The Origins Organisation and Significance of The Festival of Britain 1951

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E R R A T A

p.11 — Footnote 21. Last line should read : largely responsible for drawing up the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947.

p.50 — Five lines from the top should read : As in the case of the search for the Chairman of the Festival Council.

p.156 — Footnote 126 should read : COI, CL593, Draft Proposal, 6 April 1949.
Footnote 127 should read : Ibid., see pp. 66-67 for Barry's speech on the aims of the Festival.

p.216 — Four lines from the bottom the figure should read: £500,000.

p.237 — First two lines should read : £535,777.12s.4d, with the work being completed in fifty-four weeks; Dowsett's was £524.370 with the work completed in fifty-four weeks; and Kirk and Kirk's was £525,496 with a fifty-two week completion schedule.

p.393 — Three lines from the top should read: Gasping with delight at what he saw, Abner wrote in the Architect and Buildings News that:

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This Thesis sets out to examine an event which has been little documented and accordingly as comprehensive a view as is possible has been adopted. It will embrace an analysis of the origins of the Festival of Britain, its organisation, the content of its major exhibitions and events and finally, the impact and significance of what has turned out to be the last major exhibition to be held in post-war Britain. The content of the individual chapters is as follows:

Chapter 1: The idea of staging a first category international exhibition, the movement away from this idea towards a national exhibition and the eventual emergence of the Festival of Britain concept.

Chapter 2: The setting up of the Festival Organisation and the selection of its personnel; the influence of such selection on the Festival's aims and content.

Chapter 3: The search for acceptable sites for the component exhibitions and the Organisation's plans to give the Festival a nationwide character.

Chapter 4: The financial arrangements with particular reference to the economic climate of the time. The two major problems faced by the Organisation in their financial strategy occasioned by the London County Council claims for compensation and the difficulties sustained by the Festival Gardens Company Ltd.

Chapter 5: The publicity arrangements. A general description of the Festival elements and the official opening ceremony.

Chapter 6: A description of the South Bank site with particular reference to the architecture and design of selected pavilions as representative of certain architectural trends exemplified in pre-war exhibitions and elsewhere. Critical reaction and assessment of the contribution to British architecture of the South Bank.

Chapter 7: A survey of the other London exhibitions and of the Pleasure Gardens at Battersea.

Chapter 8: Festival activities throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

Chapter 9: Art and Design in the Festival with reference to the growth and development of the Arts Council and the Council of Industrial Design.

Chapter 10: The argument for the Festival's opening to be extended; the dismantling of exhibition material; the closing ceremony. An assessment of the general impact and significance of the Festival.

Declaration

This is to certify that the thesis has been composed and researched entirely by the undersigned.

Signed:

Inyang Isola Ime Ebong

To my Mother and Father and my Sisters Ima and Enoh.

In the unity of family I found strength.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Arts Council	AC
Board of Trade	BOT
British Film Institute	BFI
British Industries Fair	BIF
Central Office of Information	COI
Council of Industrial Design	COID
Department of Scientific and Industrial Research	DSIR
Executive Committee	EC
Festival Council	FC
Festival of Britain	FOB
Festival Pleasure Gardens	FPG
Great Exhibitions Centenary Committee (Official Committee)	OC
Investments Programmes Committee	IPC
Investment Working Party	IWP
London County Council	LCC
Lord President	LP
Modern Architectural Research Group	MARS
National Amusement Council	NAC
Public Record Office	PRO
Royal Society of Arts	RSA

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Without the generous help I received from many people, this thesis would have been an almost impossible task. I am heavily indebted to many; it is possible however to make special mention only of some. Sir Hugh Casson was the first of the men of the Festival with whom I had a meeting. He gave me encouragement and his enthusiasm for the subject was infectious. I thank him for giving me a firm foundation. Mr. Max Nicholson devoted much time to discussing the subject, sharing his vast experience and in-depth knowledge with me, I owe to him much gratitude. Other men of the Festival gave to me generously of their time and revealed a wealth of detail. Posthumously, I express my gratitude to the late Sir Huw Wheldon. My thanks are due to Sir Paul Wright. Without these meetings my knowledge of the subject would have been the poorer. Mr. Bevis Hillier from the outset was of special interest as he had written on the subject. I am grateful to him for our many conversations which I found useful.

I would like to place on record my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Paul Addison, for steering me towards this topic and for sharing his knowledge of the period with me. For my knowledge of the architectural history of the period I thank Dr. Malcolm Higgs, my supervisor on the Architectural aspects of this work.

I am deeply obliged to the staff of the following institutions: The Public Record Office, the Arts Council, the Design Council, the British Library Newspaper Library, the Central Office of Information, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Earls Court Press Office, the British Institute of Recorded Sound, the BBC Sound Archives, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Central Library of Edinburgh.

My personal thanks are due to: Dr. Tim Benton for discussing an early architectural draft with me. I benefitted from his comments and advice. Dr. Clive Strickland who has been involved in my education from a very early age and whose generosity with his time and advice has been invaluable; Dr. Noel Russell who helped me with his care and kindness from the outset of this Odyssey; I am also indebted to Mr. Colin Jessiman; Mrs. M. Laing; Mrs. L. Connolly each of whom proved constant in times of need. Miss Kate Pangbourne and Miss Karen Morrison for secretarial assistance; Mr. Steven Glyn-Jones for his photography in two volumes and to Miss Amanda Harris for her illustrations in colour from photographs of displays in the Homes and Gardens Pavilion.

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INTRODUCTION

Mention of the Festival of Britain to anyone under fifty usually elicits an uncomprehending stare. Sometimes a hesitant question follows as to whether it has anything to do with 1851. It is a striking fact that while the legend generated by the Crystal Palace and the events of 1851 has been passed down, very few if any of the younger generation can point to one significant reminder of the chronologically nearer Festival of Britain. This is not altogether surprising, for although few realise it, many institutions, museums, schools and colleges have been built from the proceeds of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Whenever the facts of the legacy of 1851 are understood, the impact and success of the event become rooted in the mind.

The Festival of Britain, on the other hand, left behind few such tangible legacies. The Royal Festival Hall on the South Bank would have been built regardless of the Festival; there are no Pleasure Gardens at Battersea; the show flats, schools and churches built in Lansbury for the Festival's Live Architectural Exhibition, although visited at the time, are hardly considered suitable or worthwhile places to visit today. These two landmarks of the Festival are not as emotive or as memorable as the Victoria and Albert Museum, Imperial College, the Natural History Museum, the Royal Albert Hall, or any of the other twenty-two institutions and scholarships created as a result of Victorian enterprise during 1851.

The legend of the Great Exhibition has, moreover been sustained by a plethora of books, chapters and articles on the subject, as well as references to be found in biographies on

Victoria and her Prince Consort Albert. In architectural books and surveys, the Crystal Palace stands as a milestone and tribute to Victorian innovation in building and design, and is indeed part of British history. The Festival of Britain cannot be so easily found in any of the many books on post-war Britain - if it is, only a few pages or paragraphs are devoted to it. There is only one book available on the subject. It was compiled by Mary Banham and Bevis Hillier, and published in 1976 to accompany the Retrospective Exhibition on the Festival of Britain held at the Victoria and Albert Museum. At the time this book was written none of the Festival of Britain files was opened to the public. As befitted its function, the book comprised in the main, interviews and articles from the major participants and visitors to the Festival of Britain. As such the authors did not attempt, in the circumstances of limited official evidence, to write a comprehensive account of the event. As an exposition to accompany the Retrospective Exhibition it served its purpose and has become a point of reference for more detailed work on the subject. It _was_therefore_ clear from the beginning of my research, that the story of the Festival of Britain had to adopt a chronological and narrative approach. In order to do this I would have, not only to tell it comprehensively by also to rely very heavily on the primary sources at the Public Record Office which were opened at the time I started my research into this topic. In conjunction with these sources, I was fortunate enough to be able to get verbal accounts during interviews with some of the men who were involved in creating the Festival. In order to visualise the Festival especially its showpiece on the South Bank, and to attempt to capture the prevailing mood and spirit of the

summer of 1951, I listened to tapes and watched available documentary materials.

Newspapers and journals of the period proved an invaluable source. I have ventured to submit a fraction of the mammoth collection of photographs in the Public Record Office, the Design Council and BBC Hulton Picture Library. It seemed to me vital in an event so little researched as the Festival of Britain to examine available visual documentation and examples of my findings are provided to supplement the text. The overwhelming visual technology of the twentieth century reached a new threshold - printing technology was rapidly developing, television was maturing. Visual documentation in print and photography assumed a greater importance in information technology than had been hitherto the case. The Festival of Britain has a contextual place in these achievements, since its subject matter was interwoven with imaginative visual effects which stimulated the response from available visual resources of the time.

The Festival of Britain's origins lie in the history of international and national exhibitions, but due to the exigencies of the time, developed a character and style of its own. The concept of the International Exhibition has its roots in the holiday feasts and market gatherings of ancient Greece and the drama and colour of medieval fairs. The International Exhibition and trade fairs that developed came into prominence as a result of rapid industrialization and advancing communications. It was, therefore, only natural for the countries who had mastered this mode of display and profited from them to want to show their skill at such

ventures.[1] Moreover mass producers needed international mass markets for their goods and the International Exhibitions and World's Fairs provided display cases reaching millions of potential customers. The first of these exhibitions was the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was primarily an industrial international exhibition, displaying all the products of the 'civilised' world. Conceived in an era full of hope and promise, housed in a building composed entirely of glass, using the effect of lighting to present an image of technological achievement, it all gave to the British an undeniable sense of status, power and prestige. The presentation of the 1851 exhibition started a world-wide trend in exhibitions that has continued for one hundred and thirty-five years.

The International Exhibition as it developed adopted a variety of roles. It was not only selling goods, it was also selling ideas:

> ideas about the relations between nations, the spread of education, the advancement of science, the form of cities, the nature of domestic life, the place of art in society. They were presenting an ordered world.[2]

Furthermore, the International Exhibition became a fashionable form of international public relations and competition among the expanding western nations. Indeed the hosting of the International Exhibition was a mandatory exercise if a country was to be considered a world power. This competition between the developing western nations meant that each succeeding exhibition had to be seen as greater, and more epic than the last, especially if the nation hosting the exhibition considered itself as having a significant role in world affairs.

1. John Allwood, The Great Exhibitions, p.7-8.
2. Burton Benedict, The Anthropology of World's Fairs, p.2.

> If London built a Crystal Palace in 1851, Paris topped it with an Eiffel Tower in 1889, Chicago with a Ferris Wheel in 1893, San Fransisco with a Tower of Jewels in 1915 and New York with a Trylon and Perisphere in 1939.[3]

Showmanship and prestige became the primary priorities, cost and financial profit became less important - to make or lose money was not a pressing point, the main issue was the spectacle.

As the nineteenth century progressed and industrialization was becoming more commonplace, another reason had to be provided for the vast expenditure of public funds. It was now thought necessary to celebrate historical landmarks, or for the exhibition to be designed with definite thematic delineation. The four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492 prompted Chicago to have an International Exhibition in 1893 - the organisers could not quite meet the 1892 deadline. The French celebrated their idealized version of the French Revolution by an Exposition Universelle in 1889, which gave birth to one of the greatest attractions of Paris - the Eiffel Tower, designed by Gustave Eiffel.[4]

The International Exhibition also had a further dimension: it became a means of recapturing lost prestige, suffered as a result of being defeated at war or sometimes even by being victorious. The exhibition in this context was now also seen as a means of diversion. The 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle was mounted to show Europe that France was still an important cultural and political centre, despite the defeat that she suffered at the hands of Prussia. That France could not afford either the cost or the

3. Ibid., p.3.
4. Allwood, p. 75. & p. 81.

effort while she was still rebuilding and recovering from the humiliating effects of defeat was not given excessive consideration. What was important was that the Government, which bore the total cost of thirty-two million francs (none of which was recovered in profits), felt justified in doing this because they believed that the exhibition would achieve its intended purpose. The visitors to the exhibition, like one Mr George Hadfield of Ross-on-Wye came away with the desired impression: "Everything on this visit struck me amazingly. The French are certainly a great people. The exhibition must affect everyone with the greatest wonder".[5] As exhibitions increased in size and frequency it was felt necessary by 1912 to set up an International Commission to regulate them.

Within the context of Exhibition history the Festival of Britain falls into a unique category. It began with the concept that the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 should be marked and celebrated. Underlying this view there rested the assumption that any effort to honour the event of 1851 must of necessity be carried out in a manner and style befitting the great occasion.

It was therefore originally conceived as an International Exhibition. On examination it was found that Britain's economy could not sustain the taxing demands of hosting such a display. The International Exhibition regulations which are still in force today make provision for two types of displays. The first, described as the 'first category', rules that the countries invited to participate in the Exhibition, must construct their national

5. Ibid., p.58.

pavilions with material and labour provided by the host country on an area which is equivalent to the overall space used by the host country to build its own pavilions. In the 'second category' the host country provides the site and, using its own architects and Exhibition planners, constructs the pavilions for the participating nations. The only type of display that a country which considers itself a world power can hold is a first category International Exhibition, showing as it does an ability to provide and fulfil all essential services and requirements.

In 1945, when the idea of Britain hosting a first category International Exhibition was raised and subsequently investigated by a Government appointed committee, it was found that Britain, greatly impoverished by war, could not possibly afford the colossal expense estimated at £70 million to host such a display. The Festival of Britain evolved as Britain's answer to its inability to host 100 years later a worthy successor to the Great Exhibition of 1851. Britain's completely altered circumstances dominated the early origins of the Festival. The Britain presented in 1951 by the Festival was far removed from the Britain inaugurated by the Great Exhibition in 1851. The overtones of prosperity and self-confidence that were the hallmark of the era immortalised by the Great Exhibition, could not be matched in the atmosphere of 1951. It was more properly a period of reassessing Britain's role in a changing world and how best to cope with the economic, social and psychological aftermath of war.

Out of necessity the celebration of 1951 was national in scope. In terms of exhibition history this type of display is limited by definition to a single nation, but is otherwise

comprehensive in structure and range. The national exhibitions were never held as frequently as the international exhibitions, and when held were 'hosted by smaller nations unable to undertake anything more ambitious, or by new or remote countries wanting to emphasize their existence in the world of nations'.[6] There are examples of smaller developing countries hosting this type of exhibition. The Florence Exhibition of 1863 began as a Tuscan Exhibition and was extended to represent the whole Italian peninsula, united two years before. In 1875 Uruguay held an exhibition in Montevideo, and Poland held an exhibition in 1929 in Poznan. In 1933 in Zurich the Swiss mounted a national exhibition.

The Festival of Britain, however went beyond being a static national exhibition. The festival planners chose to create a display, that was nationwide, thereby breaking with the traditional national exhibition format. The national displays were for the most part mounted on one site such as was the case with the Swedish national exhibition in Stockholm in 1930, which was built along the shores of the River Djurgardsbrumbinken. Further, there was a centre-piece of the South Bank, which also broke with traditional exhibition history by being the first multi-pavilioned exhibition, which not only presented a theme - that of 'British contribution to civilization in the Arts, Science and Technology and Industrial Design', but as such, told a continuous story throughout the pavilions on the site. In addition, however, to the main exhibition on the South Bank, there were the composite parts of the Festival of

6. K.W. Luckhurst, The Story of Exhibitions, p.167.

Britain: the Exhibition of Science and Technology, the Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning and Building research, three Exhibitions of Books, one in London and two in Scotland, two travelling exhibitions - one by land, the other by sea, the Exhibition of Industrial Power in Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, the Farm and Factory Exhibition in Belfast and the Dolhendre Hill Farm Scheme in Wales. The net effect of such a layout as devised by the exhibition planners in 1951, was that visitors to the exhibitions from home and abroad were given a good opportunity to study the industry, culture and way of life in Britain as a whole.[7]

The comprehensiveness of the Festival presented its own peculiar set of problems during the course of my research. Apart from the twelve official exhibitions sponsored by the Festival Organisation, they encouraged local festivals in most parts of the country. The Arts Council working as a constituent body within the Festival Organisation sponsored twenty-three Arts Festivals in centres in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. From the outset I found that general knowledge of the festival was so limited, that before I could analyse the significance of the events, I had to research and write about the Festival as a comprehensive narrative. This, however, presented further difficulties. The first of these was the quantity and diversity of the material. There were files on the proposals to hold an International Exhibition in 1951, files of the proposed national Exhibition in 1951, and finally files on the Festival of Britain. These files fell into three categories which were not always so clearly defined:

7. Ibid., p.169.

the files of the Official Committee, the Festival Council and the Executive Committee. As the Festival of Britain developed, there were files available for individual committees within the Festival Organisation. These included the Science and Technology Council, the Architecture Council, the Presentation Panel, the Publicity Planning Group, the Councils for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Arts Council and the Council of Industrial Design. Apart from these files, the Public Record Office also houses a complete collection of plans, maps and architects' drawings of the pavilions erected on the South Bank, miscellaneous items such as programmes, stamps and catalogues as well as over thirty-five volumes of photographs of the Festival of Britain. Added to the Documents at the Public Record Office there were documents related to the Festival at the Design Council, the Arts Council as well as photographic evidence of the event at the Design Council and the BBC Hulton Picture Library.

Once involved in the research on the event, it became clear to me that the best possible course of action would be, to be as selective as possible. Examining the evolution of the Festival and its organisation I could not for example become over-engrossed in the work of the numerous sub committees which the Science Council created to ensure that the exhibits on various subjects such as horticulture, agriculture, metallurgy and physics were relevant and correct. Moreover it became evident that the research into the Festival would take me into many diverse aspects such as Government, Science, Architecture, the Arts and Design. In view of the large body of diverse and specialised nature of the evidence it became

immediately clear that any treatment of the Festival would require a high degree of selectivity.

Using the available primary source material presented some problems. It must be borne in mind that many of the primary sources, written as they were in the jargon of the Civil Service had certain peculiarities of style which for the sake of authenticity I have decided to preserve. There were also problems of chronology. A great deal of the early planning of the Festival took place simultaneously. This difficulty was particularly evident in the Festival Organisation's search for sites to hold the proposed festival exhibitions. Many of the decisions related to this issue were initially discussed as a whole and agreed to. To present the material in this manner would have caused confusion in the mind of the reader. Therefore I decided to divide the early chronological events of the Festival even if they happened simultaneously or overlapped. Further, there were the difficulties with the dating of minutes. I had to decide which date to record - the date of the meeting or the date on which the minutes were typed up and sent to the various individuals for approval. In all cases in which dates of minutes are shown these are dates on which the meeting actually took place. On some notes and memoranda dates were not given, and in some cases, issues that were raised, which I was examining were not resolved. Where this has happened I have explained in a footnote.

Furthermore, in the course of my research I have been fortunate enough to have been able to interview some of the men who shaped the Festival. Once again, where I have quoted from the transcribed tapes, I have been reluctant to change the style of

conversational interviews which of necessity differs from well thought out written answers. For the verification of what I heard, I used where possible facts that I had come upon in the minutes, as there has been no other secondary source to fill this gap.

In trying to describe what the exhibitions looked like and what displays were shown, I have had to rely on the planners' intentions and the exhibition catalogues. There was no other alternative and this involved a certain amount of inevitably bare enumeration of exhibits.

On the basis of the diversity and quantity of the material on the Festival, it seemed wise to give the thesis not only a chronological and narrative order, but to divide it into two parts. The first part deals with the origins and organisation of the Festival. The emphasis in this part naturally is on the problem encountered by the Government and the Festival Organisation in attempting to stage an exhibition in post-war Britain. This part reveals most clearly how in the space of one hundred years, Britain's position had altered radically from the one inaugurated and symbolised in 1851. The second part of the thesis shows what the Festival of Britain was in terms of its exhibitions and the other activities throughout the summer of 1951 in all parts of the Kingdom. However, in this part, with the Festival exhibitions displaying approximately 10,000 items, it was necessary to be selective while giving a broad picture of how each of the 12 official exhibitions were designed and what they displayed. Some of the exhibitions, such as the South Bank, the Exhibition of Architecture and the Exhibitions of Industrial Power naturally lent themselves to well ordered visually stimulating description. Others

such as the Exhibition of Books and the Arts Festivals which had to be included in the discussion did not lend themselves as easily or readily to stimulating description. Regardless of this however, the aim of the approach I have adopted in this thesis is to give the reader an idea of the great vision and achievement of the men who presented Britain in the face of adversity with a viable 'persona' with which to enter positively into the second part of the twentieth century. Furthermore it was the Festival Council's last request, made initially to the incumbent Labour Government who agreed to it and then repeated to the newly elected Conservative Government, that the Government should give consideration to the publication of an authentic and illustrated record of genuine scholarship on the Festival of Britain. This History, the Council felt was important not only to give the public some concrete idea of how their money was spent, but also because:

> In accordance with the established principle that where some unusual type of experience has been gained in circumstances which it is hoped will not too shortly recur (such as a major war or a Festival of Britain) the experience of how to do and how not to do it should be properly recorded and made available for future administrators and students.[8]

This type of account of the Festival was never published, because the country's economic position as in the early years of the Festival's planning could not provide for it. Moreover it was the Treasury's maintained position that such a history or even a report on the Festival as also suggested by the Festival Council, was unnecessary. It was their opinion 'that the British public had had as much Festival literature as it could stand'.[9] In the end a

8. United Kingdom, Public Record Office, Cab 124/1252, Ismay to Eccles, 14 November 1951.
9. Cab 124/1252 Johnstone to Nicholson, 22 November 1951.

short report entitled The Story of The Festival Of Britain 1951 was compiled and published in 1952. The British public soon forgot about the summer of 1951. Thus thirty five years on, the process of rectification has begun. Not solely because of the exhibition's intrinsic interest to exhibition and design enthusiasts but also because of the standards it initiated and set in many areas of British life and most important of all, because of the new vision, persona and lease of life it gave the nation in 1951, at what might justly be described as the crossroads of her existence.

CHAPTER 1

A PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION IN 1951

THE IDEA OF STAGING AN INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION IN LONDON IN 1951

The idea of holding an International Exhibition in London in 1951 was first raised in December 1943 at a council meeting of the Royal Society of Arts, the body which had, as the Society of Arts, sponsored the first International Exhibition - the Great Exhibition of 1851. Despite the fact that the end of the war was not yet in sight, the members of the Society, understanding that such an event required early planning, set up a committee in January 1944 under the Chairmanship of Viscount Samuel (Vice-President of the RSA) to investigate the whole matter. This committee then approached the Royal Commission for the 1851 Exhibition with their ideas for an International Exhibition. However, although the Commission warmly received the Society's ideas, no definite action was taken.[1]

The matter was not raised again until the end of 1945 when John Gloag, an architect and member of Gordon Russell's Design Panel, wrote to The Times about celebrating the Centenary of 1851. In the letter, published on 11 September 1945, Gloag simply asked for an International Exhibition to be held in 1951 to commemorate the anniversary of "the first occasion when the British Empire displayed to the world the results of its enterprise". He wrote, "By this time the period of shortages would be over, we could show for the benefit of our trade and our national prestige, our new mastery of industrial art". Furthermore he added, "the next six years offer a great opportunity for our designers and manufacturers to be inventive and for our statesmen to be farsighted". Is it too

1. United Kingdom, Public Record Office, Cab 124/1252, Secretary of the RSA to J. Lidderdale, 13 March 1951.

early", he asked, "to begin making plans for 1951?"[2]

The second more notable letter appeared in The News Chronicle of 14 September 1945, addressed to Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, and signed by the Chronicle's editor, Gerald Barry. Barry presented cogent arguments for the necessity of holding an International Exhibition in Britain in 1951. It would he stated, "provide a powerful stimulus to both manufacturers and designers, as well as a challenge to engineers and architects", moreover, "it would be the means of attracting to this country not only traders with millions of pounds at their disposal but large numbers of foreign tourists who would spend their money in the country and we may hope - would be encouraged to repeat their visits in future years". But above all, an International Exhibition would, he believed, "afford an opportunity for assembling in London an international collection of exhibits in the fields of the arts and of science and of representing developments in the arts and crafts which have taken place in the world behind the cultural blackout of the war".[3]

Barry then went on to offer suggestions of possible sites for such an exhibition in central London : Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Green Park (with St, James's Park Lake nearby) Regents Park, and Battersea Park, "with its incomparable river frontage". They would all, he said, "provide ample space for an exhibition in which the north and south sides of the river could share the honours

2. The Times, 11 September 1945.
3. The News Chronicle, 14 September 1945.

and the advantages". If the public objected to the use of these parks for such a purpose, he continued :

> I can only reply that the citizens of London, who for six years of war were necessarily restricted in the use of these spaces, would surely welcome their temporary use for a project which would bring both credit and profit to the capital of the Empire while at the same time providing millions with enjoyment. The Thames River could come into its own as a highway for sightseers. It may even be that many of the landing-craft and ducks which would otherwise rot away on scrapheaps might be put to attractive use in the transport of visitors.

Barry concluded his letter by stating :

> I commend this suggestion to you, sir, in spite of the immense preoccupations of reconstruction which are now your responsibility, because I believe that here is an opportunity for the Labour Government to give an imaginitive lead to the nation and the Empire in a project which would be of great practical help to British traders while affording active testimony to the spirit of enterprise and skill of the British people.[4]

Sir Stafford Cripps who had, in his role as President of the Board of Trade, been trying to encourage the British people to re-establish their economic position in the world by their own exertions, accepted the sense of Barry's arguments seeing perhaps another way to achieve his goals.[5] Thus, on 25 September 1945, a

4. Ibid. Barry's argument that the public's use of London's parklands has been restricted by wartime operations was similar to the argument that would be put forward by Max Nicholson to the Lord President as to why the Government should allow the Festival Organisation to use Battersea Park to house the Festival of Britain exhibitions. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3.
5. By the end of 1945 and the beginning of 1946 Sir Stafford was involved with plans to mount an exhibition in conjunction with the Council of Industrial Design which would highlight the essence of his ideas. The exhibition entitled "Britain Can Make It" was held in 1946 at the Victoria and Albert Museum and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

committee was formed by H.A. Marquand, the Secretary for Overseas Trade (a section of the Board of Trade), "to consider in general the part which exhibitions can play in the promotion of export trade in the post-war era and in particular to consider the desirability of organising an International Exhibition in London in 1951".[6] The Ramsden Committee duly convened and presented its findings to the Government in December 1945.[7] Published in a report on 27 March 1946, they stated that the members were "strongly of the opinion that a first category International Exhibition should be held in London at the earliest practicable date, to demonstrate to the world the recovery of the United Kingdom from the effects of war in the moral, cultural, spiritual and material fields".[8] The recommendation of the committee, attractive as it was to the British Government, brought in its train a number of almost insurmountable difficulties if the standards implicit in holding a first category International Exhibition were properly adhered to. For example, a site of not less than 300 acres would need to be found, which would provide not only enough space for the fifty-odd participants but

6. Cab 124/1330.
7. The following men sat on the Ramsden Committee : Lord Ramsden (chairman), Sir Thomas Barlow, Sir Peter Bennett, F.B. Duncan, W. Evans, H. Eyles, L. Fawcett, E.W. Goodale, W.H. Lever, W. Lines, Sir Guy Locock, J. McLean, J. Davidson-Pratt, Lt. Col. H. Riggall, Sir E. Raymond Streat, K.H. Wilson. (Cab 124/1330)
8. Board of Trade Report of the Committee appointed by the Secretary for Overseas Trade under the Chairmanship of Lord Ramsden to consider the part which exhibitions and fairs should play in the promotion of Export Trade in the Post-War Era and to advise on the policy and plans to be adopted to derive the maximum advantage from such displays. (1946; Cmnd. 6728) para.66.

ensure that the total area provided for the foreign participants was at least equal to that of the national section. Furthermore, the Government would have to provide all the necessary labour and materials with which they could construct their pavilions. In addition to this, the host nation would have to bear full responsibility and cost for transporting not only its own exhibits, but those of the guest countries to and from the site, that is, to the guest country's chosen point of departure, be it by rail, sea or air, thus making adequate transportation of prime importance. If these initial problems were not daunting, the Committee's further specifications were. They stated that "since the International Exhibition of 1851 achieved an overwhelming success, any celebration of its Centenary must be staged on a scale to ensure a repetition of that success". In case anyone was unsure of the kind of success they envisaged, they specified that the planned exhibition "should surpass the New York World's Fair of 1939 in scale and technical achievement and the Paris Exhibition of 1937 in aesthetic excellence and personal appeal".[9] With the last two stipulations, the Committee placed the planners in a most awkward position. If the proposed British exhibition were to surpass the New York World's Fair, it would require both an unlimited supply of funds and a very great deal of flair and imagination, features which always characterize and seem to be abundant in any American undertaking. In addition they would need a site of considerable dimensions if they were even to approach the layout of the American exhibition which occupied 1,216.5 acres. To attempt to better the Paris

9. Ibid., para.68.

exhibition of 1937, 'in aesthetic excellence', would require that the layout of the city of London be as naturally magnificent as the city of Paris.[10] The Committee decided that the proposed exhibition's best hope of success lay with the choice of a suitable site.The members insisted that the exhibition be mounted in a capital city, which essentially meant London. Furthermore, they felt that it should be sited in Hyde Park with its natural beauty and strong historical associations.[11]

However, in order to counter any possible critisism of the expense that such a vast undertaking might incur, the Committee cautioned the Government that :

> any such exhibition must result in considerable expenditure and the diversion of labour and materials at the expense of other urgent forms of post-war reconstruction. To justify the heavy expenditure of money and the large allocation of labour necessary to make an International Exhibition a success, it is essential that in the meanwhile there must have been adequate progress made in the provision of dwelling-houses, schools and other public institutions already promised, and in addition sufficient industrial buildings of all classes provided to enable industry to function efficiently.[12]

The recommendations of the Ramsden report were accepted at a

10. The layout of the 1937 Paris exhibition, set in the heart of this great city, as were all the previous 19th century exhibitions was its strongest point. The architectural designs in the exhibition unfortunately did not live up to the grandeur of the site. This exhibition will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6.
11. Ramsden Report (1946; Cmnd.6728) paras.69-70.
12. Ibid., para.72.

meeting of the Lord President's Committee on 15 March 1946.[13] On 3 April, H.A. Marquand made the following statement to the House of Commons:

> The Government are impressed by the views expressed in the Report and have decided to accept the recommendations. I am arranging for the necessary preparatory work to be put in hand. This will include the choice of a suitable site. As suggestions have been made that Hyde Park should be the site, I may as well make it clear at once that the Government are not prepared to see Hyde Park used for this purpose.[14]

The Government's refusal to allow Hyde Park to be used for the exhibition was based on the assumption that such use would encroach on the public's enjoyment of the park over a period of two or three years.[15]

Following this announcement an Interdepartmental meeting was held on 30 July 1946 at the Board of Trade. Present at this meeting were members of the Board of Trade (including the Export Promotion Department), the Lord President's Office, the Treasury, the Colonial Office, the Scottish Office, the Ministries of Health, Town and Country Planning, Transport and Works. The Chairman, J.R.C. Helmore of the Board of Trade, explained that the meeting had been called in order to select sites worthy of investigation to house the International Exhibition. In the discussion which followed, F.J. Root, the representative for the Ministry of Works, pointed out that

13. Cab 124/1330. The Committee of the Lord President of the Council: This Committee, headed by Herbert Morrison, the Lord President, contained the most senior Cabinet Ministers from various domestic Departments. It acted as a sort of preliminary Cabinet and clearing house for domestic policy issues from items of minor detail up to the broadest questions of national planning. B. Donoghue and G.W. Jones, Herbert Morrison Portrait of a Politician, pp. 348-349.
14. United Kingdom, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 421 (1945-46) 1251.
15. Cab 124/1330.

the Government's rejection of the use of Hyde Park consequently ruled out the use of any Royal Park and probably all public open spaces.[16]

The only alternative left to the members was to investigate and discuss further the possibility of using sites which were little used for recreation: Barnes Common, Ranelagh Club and Putney Lower Common, which together provided 285 acres. This combined site was selected because of its proximity to central London though it depended upon the development of transport facilities in order to be readily accessible, and upon the willingness of the Ministry of Health to consider the possibility of deferring their plans for housing 17,000 people on the Ranelagh Club estate; Heston Airport which provided 200 acres; Crystal Palace which also provided 200 acres; Trent Park which provided 950 acres; Wormwood Scrubs which provided 193 acres; and Professor Holford's scheme for using the North and South Banks of the Thames which provided 92 acres, with an amusement area to be sited in Regent's Park. Although the site proposed by Professor Holford was by far the smallest, there were disadvantages in splitting up the site, as well as administration and transportation difficulties. The members felt that investigations should be made into these riverside locations on the basis of using the South Bank for permanent buildings.[17] The members decided that the most suitable way of investigating any of the sites was to set up a Working Party consisting of the representatives of the Ministries of Town and Country Planning,

16. Cab 124/1330, BoT Interdepartmental Meeting, 30 July 1946.
17. Ibid.

Transport and Works, the London County Council and the ExportPromotion Department of the Board of Trade, which would investigate further only four of the six sites already mentioned. The sites in their brief were: Barnes Common and Ranelagh Club and Putney Lower Common, Wormwood Scrubs; the South Bank of the Thames; and Crystal Palace. The members concluded their meeting by stating that it would be desirable for the Working Party to submit a considered report, within a month, stating the relative suitability of the four sites in question with due regard to the responsibilities of the other departments concerned.[18]

18. Ibid. The men who formed the Working Party were: W.M. Ogden, of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning; H.R. Lintern, H.B. Aldington and A.H.G. Trench, of the Ministry of Transport; R.A. Barker, F.W. Wright and D.W. Odell, of the Ministry of Works; H.R. Oswald, of the London County Council; R.E.J. Moore and C.J. Homewood, of the Export Promotion Department of the Board of Trade.

THE SEARCH FOR A SITE

In the course of its short investigative life (they presented their final report to the Interdepartmental Committee on 17 September 1946) the Working Party was able to reveal the numerous problems that the austerity-ridden nation would encounter by trying to host a first category International Exhibition. In considering the four sites presented to them by the Board of Trade, the Working Party reviewed each site with regard to the size of the area, the location and amenities, available transportation facilities, the absence of conflict with other projects and finally suitability for the erection of a permanent building for the British Industries Fair.[19] Barnes Common, Ranelagh Club and Putney Lower Common was the first site to be rejected on the grounds that part of the site had been earmarked by the Ministry of Health for housing 17,000 people, thus reducing the total available acreage considerably. Furthermore, the proximity of the area to Putney and Barnes Cemetries presented a visual disadvantage. Added to these difficulties, an adequate transportation system would have to be installed exclusively for the exhibition.

19. Cab 124/1330, Report of the Working Party on the 1951 exhibition site, 17 September 1946. The Ramsden Report recommended that the BIF should be concentrated in one centre. A site, preferably, but not necessarily in central London should be secured for the erection of permanent buildings, to house both the BIF and other exhibitions, which should be of a type capable of extension and adaptation as required, for which the site to be acquired should allow. (Cmnd. 6728)

The Working Party felt that the 193 acres provided by the Wormwood Scrubs site would be insufficient because there was little possibility of extending the site to the south and east, and in addition to this, the problems of providing suitable access by road were almost insuperable. However, the Working Party's most important reason for rejecting this site was for what they described as the area's "bad psychological associations" which they felt could not even be overcome with a change of name and a prolonged publicity campaign.[20]

The third area examined by the Committee was the South Bank scheme decided by Professor Holford: the scheme provided 69 acres on the South Bank and 23 acres on the North Bank in the St. Paul's area which, when combined, would give an overall area of 92 acres. The amusement park, an obligatory feature of every International Exhibition, would be situated in 150 acres in the undeveloped part of Regent's Park.[21] Herbert Morrison (the Lord President) had been so strongly in favour of this scheme that he had written to H.A. Marquand on 21 March 1946 indicating his approbation:

> I would, therefore, urge that before any other site is chosen a very careful examination should be made of the possibilities of the South Bank of the Thames in the area between say London Bridge and Vauxhall Bridge, or between Waterloo and Westminster Bridges. For instance, between Southwark Bridge and Waterloo, or between Lambeth Bridge and Vauxhall Bridge, there are quite considerable areas which seem worth investigating and there is a possible (though smaller) site adjoining the County Hall and Waterloo Station.

20. Ibid.
21. Professor Holford: Professor of Planning of London University, Chief Research Officer for the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. Together with P. Abercrombie he devised a scheme for the redevelopment of the blitzed City of London, as well as the reconstruction of the South Bank Scheme. He was also largely responsible for drawing up the Town and Country Act of 1947.

Morrison acknowledging the South Bank's physical defects, still defended its selection, saying :

> I appreciate the difficulties of securing a large enough site without coming up against railway viaducts, but given anything like as much ingenuity as was shown at Paris this handicap could be overcome and, as long-term plans for the development of the South Bank and for the removal of the railway viaducts mature, the buildings could be added to and the amenities improved. In choosing the South Bank we would be able to make use of the waterfront with the historic landmarks of the North Bank as a background. The publicity advantages would be immense ... I know there will be all sorts of arguments on the other side, but a decision to combine the exhibition with giving the South Bank its natural place in London's life will provide an impetus for the whole scheme which we cannot afford to ignore.[22]

Despite Morrison's arguments, the Working Party ruled out the use of the South Bank site stating, "we cannot believe that the legal and physical problems involved in using this area for the exhibition would be solved in time to allow the completion of the necessary work". Although the South Bank could eventually yield 125 acres, the legal problem to get this acreage would involve the massive resettlement of the local commercial and residential population that inhabited the area despite its war-ravaged state. The physical obstacles included: a discontinuous frontage, transportation problems and linkage difficulties of the four principal areas lying near to the site and to the amusement ground which, they said should be situated possibly in Battersea Park.[23]

The last site to be investigated was at Crystal Palace, but this too was ruled out; factors in its favour had been its historical association with the Great Exhibition, its established reputation as an exhibition centre, and the known readiness of the

22. Cab 124/1330, Morrison to Marquand, 21 March 1946.
23. Ibid. Working Party Report on the site, 17 September 1946.

Crystal Palace Trustees to do all in their power to make the 200 acres available. However, there was little hope of securing any substantial additional space adjoining the grounds of the former Palace. Furthermore, the existing access by road and rail was regarded by the Ministry of Transport as insufficient and any improvements made would, they felt, only be useful during the life of the exhibition.[24]

Realising the difficulties of searching for an exhibition site in London, the Working Party decided to consider another scheme devised by Professor Holford, this time set outside London in Osterley Park. Of all the sites the Working Party examined, they recommended Osterley Park as the most suitable area to house the proposed exhibition.[25] It was a well laid out and spacious site, providing 640 acres and, with the use of the adjoining lands, a total of 800 acres was available. Furthermore, being situated near to the proposed London Airport, the transportation facilities which were being planned for the airport could, they believed, be adapted with comparative ease to meet the needs of the exhibition. However, despite the site's obvious advantages, the Working Party felt it necessary to point out certain facts which finally established, without doubt, the serious miscalculation on the part of the Government in thinking that the British post-war domestic economy could possibly support the overwhelming burdens that an International Exhibition would inflict. The Working Party explained that to house an exhibition at Osterley Park would incur expenditure

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.

of £20 million in labour and materials alone, and a further £50 million for improving the transportation facilities, specifically two new railway routes required from central London, as well as roadworks.[26] Furthermore, the vast constructional work involved would, the Working Party felt, cause a serious drain on the labour force available for other priority works, requiring as it would approximately 20,000 men in 1948, 25,000 in 1949 and 28,000 in 1950.[27]

The final report of the Working Party was presented to the Interdepartmental Committee of the Board of Trade on 17 September 1946. Two days after the presentation of the report, the Committee met to discuss the Working Party's recommendation that the exhibition should be situated in Osterley Park. The members decided that before any decision was made or a report presented to the Ministers on Osterley Park, the proposal should be submitted to the Investment Working Party (IWP) for their consideration. This view was fully supported by their Minister, Sir Stafford Cripps, the President of the Board of Trade. The IWP, which was composed of representatives from the Treasury, the Central Statistical Office (Cabinet Economic Section), the Board of Trade, the Ministries of Health, Labour, Agriculture, Supply, Transport, Works and Town and Country Planning and the Scottish Office, met on 25 October 1946. The Chairman, Sir Bernard Gilbert, opened the meeting by stating

26. Ibid. A very substantial part of this expenditure on transport facilities would they pointed out be necessary in any case in connection with the proposed London Airport and other long-term needs.
27. Work 25/7.

that the normal function of the IWP was to consider the timing of investment projects but, as far as the 1951 exhibition was concerned, this function was clearly inappropriate as the exhibition had already been fixed for 1951. He therefore proposed that the members should discuss the consequences of holding an exhibition in 1951 and produce a factual report on the economic cost of the exhibition as soon as possible, which would be sent to Sir Stafford, who had asked for the report to be made.[28]

The IWP's request confirmed the initial warnings made by the Board of Trade's Working Party. Their report, concentrating on the effects which the proposed exhibition would have on types of building and civil engineering works, confirmed the Board of Trade's Working Party's figures for labour requirements from 1948-1950, although it stated that the works(that is road and rail) carried out by the labour force would ultimately be needed as part of the general plans for improving communications in and around London. Moreover, the effect of the exhibition, the report confirmed, would be to "bring forward into the immediate future schemes which would otherwise not be started for seven or eight years".[29] Regardless of this, however the report went on to state that judging from the requirements already submitted to the Ministry of Works by various Departments, for direct work and licenced private work, it would be fair to assume that there would be a shortage of about 70,000 people in the building industry in the London region throughout the period

28. Cab 124/1331, Investment Working Party Meeting, 25 October 1946.
29. Ibid. Investment Working Party, Report on 1951 Exhibition, 1 November 1946.

in which the exhibition was being constructed. The priorities in that period were, the report stated, essential projects such as housing, railways, waterworks, sewage and generating schemes, as well as maintenance work, which could no longer be shelved. Furthermore, the labour required for the construction of Heathrow Airport and the new Government office had to be considered, and the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Supply estimated further that between 20,000 and 30,000 building workers would be required in the London area for the construction of private factories and offices. The labour requirements were, the report continued, between one quarter and one third of the requirements for all other major new works in the London area. The report concluded that the exhibition would make very heavy demands on building materials, the extent of which could not be fully assessed. As an example of the exhibition's building materials requirements, the report highlighted the needs of the new underground railways which were regarded as essential ancillaries to the exhibition; for their construction, about 50,000 tons of steel and between 400-500,000 tons of cast iron would be required. The report concluded that "as the prospective shortage of steel (and correspondingly of iron) will amount to some 2 million tons in 1947 and is unlikely to disappear in the years immediately following, the exhibition will have a substantial impact on this sphere as well".[30]

The findings of the Investment Working Party were presented to Sir Stafford Cripps who, on seeing these figures, was forced to admit that the prospect of diverting such a substantial proportion

30. Ibid.

of the labour and materials available in the London area was not feasible and that perhaps the project ought to be abandoned. However, before announcing a definite decision as to the fate of the proposed exhibition, Sir Stafford felt that the views of the Royal Society of Arts' members should be canvassed. On 18 December 1946, the members of the Committee set up by the Royal Society to investigate the 1951 exhibition, led by Viscount Samuel, visited Sir Stafford and presented strongly to him their view that the Government's decision to exclude Hyde Park, as a possible site for the exhibition, was taken without any real knowledge of the probable reactions of the public to such a proposal.[31] To find out what the reaction of the public would be, the members of the Society proposed to hold a conference of representatives of interested organisations and groups within the community in order to consider the feasibility of a large international exhibition in Hyde Park either in 1951 or later.[32] Sir Stafford decided to wait for the outcome of this conference before announcing the Government's decision.[33]

The Conference was held on 6 February 1947 at the RSA with representatives from 101 organisations present. The response of the delegates to the proposition of holding an exhibition in 1951 in Hyde Park was mixed. While the majority of representatives felt

31. Cab 124/1331, Memo by Sir Stafford Cripps to Lord President's Committee, March 1946.
32. U.K. Royal Society of Arts, "Memo by Viscount Bennett to 150 organisations", Journal of the Royal Society of Arts, XCV (17 January 1947), p.115.
33. Cab 124/1331, Memo by Sir Stafford Cripps to the Lord President's Committee, March 1946.

that there should be an exhibition in 1951, some, like Mr. Jacobs, Secretary of the London Trades Council and C.H. Gilkes of the Headmaster's Conference, disagreed. Both Jacobs and Gilkes based their objections on the March 1947 shortages of materials and labour. Jacobs said that his Executive opposed the scheme "as an unwarranted waste of men and materials at the present time". He continued :

> Hundreds of thousands were homeless, and whatever the press said, materials were short. Hundreds of thousands of work people, and some of the best craftsmen the unions could supply would be required. They could not be spared from building the houses of ordinary people. The exhibition would take longer than a year to build. The experience of the New York and Paris exhibitions had proved that it would make us more, not less lethargic, to realise that men and materials were being used to build not homes but an exhibition.[34]

Furthermore, he said that London had insufficient hotels to house all the visitors to London and his Executive was not in favour of building hotels instead of homes for the people. At any other time, he concluded, "his council would have supported an exhibition but at the moment they thought the project ill-advised, and regretted to say that if a decision were taken to go on with it, they would actively oppose it". Gilkes, on behalf of the educational authorities, said that his school had suffered war-damage and he had been told that he could not even apply to rebuild it for another five years. "It was nonsense", he said, "to suggest that the situation in 1951, in the educational world at least would not be completely disastrous". Other representatives, while wishing to see an exhibition in 1951, did not wish to see it situated in Hyde Park; they felt that Crystal

34. "Conference on the Proposed 1951 Exhibition", Journal of the RSA, XCV (14 March 1947), p.232.

Palace, or better still, the South Bank site, would be a perfectly good setting, arguing that it would be better to wipe out its unsightliness and create something of new and lasting value, rather than destroy something of beauty. Viscount Samuel sent a report of the meeting to Sir Stafford on 14 February 1947 and asked for an interview with him to discuss the findings.[35] On 26 February 1947, Sir Stafford replied to Samuel thanking him for sending the report. He said :

> I find this very interesting and I am struck by the resemblance between the various opinions expressed and our own views some months back, before a detailed assessment of the implications of the proposal had been made with expert advice. This assessment proved most disappointing, and I fear that the Conference had done (and, indeed, could do) little to reassure me that the heavy demand upon construction labour could be undertaken without serious diversion from more immediate necessities. The larger proportion of this labour would be required not for construction on the site, but for the transport improvements essential to carry the heavy traffic anticipated.

He concluded his letter to Samuel by stating that "there is little possibility of the Society's faith in the project outweighing the facts which examination has brought to light", adding that if they felt it necessary, they could arrange a meeting not with him but with Marquand, the Secretary for Overseas Trade.[36]

The RSA's conference was unable to alter the course on which the Government now seemed set. Sir Stafford Cripps reported to the Lord President's Committee in March 1947 that he now had to suggest, albeit with some reluctance, that the Government "should now frankly say that having examined, in detail the estimated cost of an

35. Ibid., p.237.
36. Ibid., p.238.

exhibition in labour and material, it could not at present favour a large scale project which might seriously conflict with housing and with general industrial, transport and public utility development."[37]

Regardless of this, however, he felt strongly that 1951 should be marked by some outstanding event. The question that was now preoccupying the officials was what event or series of events would be worthy or such an auspicious date. As he explained in his memorandum to the Lord President's Committee, Sir Stafford had begun to look for viable alternatives, as early as December 1946, when the possibility of holding an International Exhibition was slowly fading. He had asked for an examination to be made of the possibility of holding an outstanding British Industries Fair in new permanent buildings on the Osterley Park site, in the hope that this would serve as the first step towards developing the site for an International Exhibition in 1956, if Britain had to withdraw her claim for 1951. However, the estimates he received for this seemingly simple request were, he said, formidable. The main expenditure, he explained, would be for transport facilities, with the total cost of the project amounting to about £36 million and involving a labour force of 11,000 in 1948, 14,000 in 1949 and 16,000 in 1950. Facing these facts he was forced once again to conclude that :

> this suggestion must also be ruled out and that, in the light of the uncertainties as to the position in 1956 and the impractability of a second deferment, it would be preferable to announce indefinite postponement and to reconsider the

37. Cab 124/1331, Memo by Sir Stafford Cripps to the Lord President's Committee, March 1946.

> project in two or three years time when the competing claims on our national resources can be more clearly seen.[38]

In spite of this second setback, Sir Stafford still clung to the idea that the Centenary of 1851 had to be celebrated. He suggested the year could be marked, if it was possible, by the opening of a permanent exhibition building situated either on the South Bank, Crystal Palace or Alexandra Palace. The new building would be equipped with administrative facilities to act as a reception centre for overseas commercial visitors, and the British Industries Fair would be its first occupant. An area of 35 acres would be needed for the project, with construction costs estimated at the considerably cheaper sum of £8.5 million. In addition to this, he said he was hoping to arrange for the staging of an exhibition in conjunction with the Council of Industrial Design, which would be housed in the same building, after the British Industries Fair, and would display the latest developments in British design. This display would possibly be executed along the same lines as the recent "Britain Can Make It" Exhibition of 1946[39] He added that there might be a cultural exhibition combined with these events in 1951, where it would be located was, however, still a matter for consideration. Sir Stafford concluded his memo by asking his colleagues to agree to the announcement being

38. Ibid.
39. Ibid. "The Britain Can Make It" Exhibition 1946. This exhibition was held in the Victoria and Albert Museum and as the title implies was designed to show that Britain could literally and figuratively make it after the war. Displaying 6,000 products from 1,300 firms newly switched from warwork, none of the goods exhibited were for home consumption ... all of them much to the public's disappointment was marked for export only. See pp.508-512 for a fuller discussion of this exhibition.

made, without further delay, that no "first category" International Exhibition would be held in London in 1951; and that the possibility of such an exhibition being held in London would be considered in a few years time. He further asked for permission to say that for the occasion, consideration was being given to the construction and opening of an exhibition hall in 1951, which would house the British Industries Fair, as well as an industrial design exhibition and a cultural display.

On March 28, 1947 Sir Stafford made the following statement to the House of Commons :

> The possibility of holding an International Exhibition in London in 1951 has been the subject of long and careful inquiry. I have, as a result, most reluctantly concluded that it would be impossible to stage such an exhibition in that year, involving large scale demands on labour and materials, without impeding the progress of urgent tasks of reconstruction .... The Centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851 should, however be marked by some national display. Methods can undoubtedly be found involving relatively little new construction work outside the programme already in the course of planning. These might include a cultural festival as well as a design display on the lines of the recent "Britain Can Make It" Exhibition.[40]

The Labour administration had managed to extricate itself from the costly requirements of an International Exhibition but, not from the idea of celebrating the Centenary of 1851. Being the shrewd group of politicians they undoubtedly were, they realised that they had to do something, for the idea of holding an International Exhibition had been debated and discussed in Parliament, and the public, with the aid of the press had been led to believe that it would be held. Furthermore, perhaps they too felt compelled to

40. UK, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 435 (1946-47), 241-242.

remember the halcyon days of the Victorian era, for, although they were socialists committed to the long awaited social change, they were, first and foremost, British and as such, they understood instinctively the emotive symbolism of 1851, realising that in some way the date had to be acknowledged. The proposals that they now put forward would not involve the financial outlay or drain on scarce resources that an International Exhibition would have done. On the other hand, even though the reduced celebrations were now the only option, the nation would be expected to present a display that was both excellent in its own right and at the same time, a worthy successor to the Great Exhibition, recapturing its spirit while emphasising the symbolism that was the essence of 1851.

THE NATIONAL EXHIBITION IN 1951

With Sir Stafford's announcement, the proposed project was turned over to the Lord President's office, with Morrison acting as the Minister in charge, as Sir Stafford's sphere of interest did not include arranging an exhibition of this nature. The proposals that were now being discussed for the centenary, the special British Industries Fair, the Design Display and possibly a cultural festival had been emerging in the course of departmental discussions held as early as December 1946, four months before Sir Stafford's announcement. On 15 January 1947 Miss Glasgow, Secretary-General of the Arts Council was approached by J. Lidderdale, Secretary of the Lord President's office, to find out if the Arts Council would be prepared to sponsor a cultural exhibition in 1951, which would be held in conjunction with the annual UNESCO Conference, if Britain's bid to host the conference was successful. Miss Lidderdale explained to Miss Glasgow that much of the work for the exhibition would be handled through the COID and, furthermore, she envisaged, she said, an exhibition that would be more diffuse in form than the usual type of exhibition housed under one roof.[41] Mary Glasgow's response to this invitation was to state that while the Arts Council were very much flattered by the invitation, she felt that it was altogether too big a job for her Organisation which had a small staff, all of whose energies were devoted to the encouragement of music and the arts in the country as a whole, especially in the

41. Cab 124/1331, Memo by J. Lidderdale to Nicholson, 15 January 1947.

regional areas. She said that she could not see how the arranging of a Cultural Exhibition in 1951 could be managed by the Council without disturbing its normal course of duties, but that she would discuss the matter with the Chairman, Sir Ernest Pooley, and later put the matter before the Executive Committee of the Council. [42] On 16 January, Mary Glasgow contacted Miss Lidderdale to inform her that she had discussed the matter of the Arts Council's acting as the Government's agent for a Cultural Exhibition with the Chairman, and though he was very interested in this proposition, he agreed that such a task could not be undertaken by them without enlarging the staff of the Council. He was, however, prepared to discuss the subject with his Vice Chairman and the Executive Committee.[43]

Following these exchanges between the Lord President's office and the Arts Council, an informal meeting was held on 23 January 1947 in the rooms of Sir John Maud of the Ministry of Education, attended by representatives of the Ministry of Education (D.H. Leadbetter), the Lord President's Office (M.Nicholson, J.Lidderdale) the Board of Trade (D.H. Lyall, A.E. Miles Davies) and Mary Glasgow of the Arts Council. D.H. Lyall outlined the ideas that had so far been agreed to at the Board of Trade. The British Industries Fair and Design Display he said would be separate, it would need, judging from its proposed layout, an area of between 20-30 acres, and the favoured site for it was Crystal Palace. The representatives then turned their attention to discussing the nature of the proposed

42. Ibid.
43. Cab 124/1331, Memo by Lidderdale to Nicholson, 16 January 1947.

cultural exhibition. The ideas that emerged were that there would be an exhibition which would be partly an "exhibition" and partly a "Festival", held at different locations.[44] The overall cultural exhibition would be described as a "Festival" rather than an exhibition because this gave the idea more clearly of a succession of events held in different places rather than a static spectacle in one large building or in one area.[45] Further views were expressed as to whether the Festival should be national or international. Sir John Maud said that if the event was linked to UNESCO Month in London in 1951, there would be no obligation to make it international. Nicholson further added that it might, however, be desirable to invite selected countries to send perhaps a ballet or theatre company to London at this time. The representatives then discussed the matter of the exhibition/festival's scope. Sir John Maud said that he visualised a Fine Arts exhibition and a festival which would include the sciences. However, it was concluded that as the plans were not finalised it was difficult to get a clear picture of the scope of the exhibition/festival.[46]

However, by February 1947, a clearer picture emerged of the nature of the events being planned for 1951. On 17 February 1947, in his report, Nicholson outlined the ideas that had so far been agreed upon: the proposed British Industries Fair would be housed in a permanent exhibition building; a Design Display would be sponsored by the COID; and the Arts Council were to sponsor and arrange a cultural festival which would include an exhibition of the Arts and

44. Cab 124/1331, Note for the record, 27 January 1947.
45. Cab 124/1332, Arts Council Minutes, 29 January 1947.
46. Ibid. Note for the record, 27 January 1947.

Sciences. This cultural festival, Nicholson explained, was favoured by the Board of Trade as a means of attracting tourists to London; by the Ministry of Education "as an opportunity for using the value of the 1851 Centenary to review and stimulate British progress in the arts and civilization"; and by the Lord President who perceived the event as an opportunity for advertising Britain's contribution to modern civilization.[47] At the Lord President's request, it was agreed that an exhibition of the sciences would be included in the Cultural Festival; for it was his view that prominence should be given to the particularly important role science had and still played in Britain's contribution to civilization.[48] This belief can of course be understood in light of the fact that at the end of the war, the country at large was revelling in a celebration of the inventiveness of her scientists and technologists, who were being regarded not only as being unsurpassed in the world, but also as having played a major part in helping the country defeat the might of the German war-machine.[49]

Nicholson continued his explanation of the content of the Cultural Festival by stating that it was still not yet determined what its scope should be and who would participate in it. However, what had been determined, he said, was that it would cover drama, music, opera, ballet, painting, sculpture, photography, films, books, science and technology, with the main emphasis in these areas

47. Cab 124/1231, Report by Nicholson on the proposed 1951 Exhibition, 19 February 1947. Nicholson was an adviser to the Lord President; his role in the nascent Festival will be discussed in Chapter 2.
48. Cab 124/1331, Note for the record, 15 February 1947.
49. Correlli Barnett, The Audit of War, p.3.

being the British contribution to these fields. It might be possible, he said, to invite the Dominions and Colonies to make selected contributions to the festival. It would, in any event, be necessary to set up an official committee made up from representatives of the various Government departments, outside bodies such as the RSA, and the Royal Academy which would oversee the general arrangements for 1951. In addition to this, the exhibitions for the year would be organised by the Central Office of Information (COI), the organisers of all Government-sponsored exhibitions, in conjunction with the Arts Council which would, in this instance, be the COI's "client". If it proved acceptable, it was further hoped, he said, that it would be possible for the Cultural Festival to be organised on a decentralised basis with simultaneous shows being staged in Scotland and Wales as well as in other suitable places such as Oxford, Cambridge, Stratford-upon-Avon and York.[50] The idea of decentralising the cultural festival had originally been put to Nicholson by the Arts Council, and he accepted their interesting suggestion because, as he explained in a letter to Mary Glasgow:

> We have had great difficulty with Scotland, and to some extent with Wales, over the growing concentration of important things in London, and I expect the Government would be very much welcome giving prominence to separate Scottish and Welsh elements in the proposed festival with the utmost practicable devolution of responsibility. The Lord President made a strong bid to get the recent "Britain Can Make It" Exhibition sent to Glasgow, but it unfortunately proved impracticable on grounds of expense, and Scotland had to be left out as usual.[51]

50. Cab 123/133l, Report by Nicholson, 19 February 1947.
51 Ibid. Nicholson to Glasgow, 20 February 1947.

On 14 March 1947, Nicholson wrote to Sir John Maud of the Ministry of Education to say that the new proposals for 1951 had in principle been agreed to by the Lord President's Committee, subject to any serious objections being raised. The only objection, he said, was raised by the Ministry of Works, which felt that "a project requiring £8.5 million on construction work could only be carried out at the expense of all kinds of other important projects such as housing, new towns, transport and government buildings". The idea of a design display and an exhibition of arts and sciences had however been approved. Nicholson informed Maud that he had spoken to Mary Glasgow and that she had agreed to prepare a report on the possible organisation of the arts festival. He also added that the Arts Council, although aware that their Charter did not include "science", were prepared to organise a science and technology exhibition. Nicholson said that he had agreed to this on condition that the council consulted the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) and other research councils and the COI as the group responsible for mounting the exhibitions.[52]

During this period of planning a national exhibition, there were individuals from Government departments, in particular the Treasury, who felt that the proposals for the exhibition were too limited in scope. Their main concern was that the topics they deemed important, apart from the arts, science and technology, were not included in the exhibition programme. The idea of introducing a wider spectrum of subject matter into the exhibition was first

52. Cab 124/1331, Nicholson to Sir John Maud, 14 March 1947.

raised in a letter from Mr. Hale of the Treasury, to Max Nicholson of the Lord President's Office. He stated plainly that he found it,

> difficult to conceive a display illustrating the British contribution to civilization without a Commonwealth and Empire theme of some sort, and that even on the United Kingdom side, our contribution to civilization (apart from Fine Arts) seems inadequately reflected by isolated sections of industrial design and scientific and technical accomplishment. The suggestion is that our contribution to the field of self government, social services, and law and order has been far more outstanding than in the field of industrial design, and that such things are not outside the scope of modern exhibition techniques.[53]

They envisaged an exhibition that would include a comparison of the state of working class housing in 1851 to that of 1951, as well as an illustration of the health services.[54]

The Lord President and his staff rejected these suggestions because they felt that their inclusion would be a mistake.[55] Morrison acknowledged the desire of various individuals to broaden the range of the exhibition, but refused to do so on the grounds that the resources available for the exhibition were too limited to include visual presentations of this nature. However, to placate any ruffled feelings he said that he would allow the organisers of the exhibition some latitude in the arranging of the various sections. Moreover, he conceded:

> If, for instance, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisations were to hold their annual conference in London in 1951, then there would be a case for including a separate section devoted to education, or, for giving emphasis to it in other ways.[56]

53. Cab 124/1332, Hale to Nicholson, June 12 1947.
54. Cab 132/6.
55. Max Nicholson, Interview held at 13 Upper Cheyne Row, London, 20 January 1984.
56. Cab 124/1332, Draft by Lord President, June 1947.

The real reason for the exclusion of these high minded ideas lay not with their potential cost, which was a convenient scapegoat on Morrison's part, but with the kind of exhibition Morrison and his staff, in particular Max Nicholson were beginning to conceptualise. The exhibition, they decided, was going to provide unity for the nation and, as such, subjects that might prove politically contentious or divisive had at all costs to be avoided. Furthermore, the exhibition was going to be used as a platform from which the public were to be shown the numerous possibilities that post-war Britain held for them. In order to do this, the exhibition had to be weighted in favour of design and science and technology as a means of illustrating some of these opportunities. The view held by the Lord President and his staff was that displays on law and order and the social services would not only be difficult to translate into visual terms but, more importantly, such displays could only give a backward looking picture. The accent of this exhibition was, in their mind's eye, clearly on Britain's future in the post-war era, on what she had to contribute not only to her own citizens, but to the world at large.[57]

Thus the proposed national exhibition would remain a cultural, industrial and scientific affair. On 3 April 1947 the Arts Council presented the report which Nicholson had requested on the Cultural Festival, to the Lord President's office. In the Arts Council's plan the British Industries Fair and the exhibition of industrial design would merely form a "valuable background" for the proposed

57. Nicholson, Interview, 20 January 1984.

Cultural Festival.[58] The Festival would, the Council said, be held over an eight week period between June and August and would include music, drama, opera, ballet and films. It would be housed in existing concert halls and theatres and certain buildings not normally used for such purposes, such as Hampton Court Palace and Greenwich Palace, and it was hoped one or two new concert halls, which were being planned, might be ready to use by 1951. In addition to these events, the council said there would be relatively small, highly-selective, historical displays of painting, sculpture, photography, books, industrial design and science and technology, which would also probably be held in existing buildings, or, if possible, in newly constructed exhibition spaces. If they were to be held in existing buildings, the Directors of the National Museums (and other required buildings) would be contacted as soon as the details were finalised. The Arts Council decided that the festival should only illustrate the work of Britain; this, however, did not mean, they explained, with specific reference to the arts, that only British plays and music could be performed, or only British pictures or films could be shown. It would mean they said "that the resources of this country alone would be relied upon and no official invitations would be issued to foreign countries to send representative artists or works of art".[59]

The report confirmed that the music and drama would not be confined to London but would cover as much of the country as possible, taking in already established festivals such as those in

58. Cab 124/1331, Notes on possible organisation of a Festival of Arts in 1951, 3 April 1947.
59. Ibid.

Edinburgh, Stratford-upon-Avon and Malvern. The report of the Arts Council went on to suggest the possible composition of the organisation which would be set up to arrange the Cultural Festival: there would be a Cabinet Minister responsible to Parliament at the summit; a General Council of the exhibition composed of responsible Ministers and others chosen for their personal distinction; below this, the Arts Council as programme directors, with one specially appointed individual to direct the operation who would be responsible to the Council; and below this there would be a specialist committee to cover the fields of science and industrial design, composed of individuals representing existing organisations such as the COID, who would help to organise the specifics of the exhibitions. The Festival should, the Council concluded, be under the direction of a single body with a single individual responsible for it, and the Council recommended themselves most strongly as being a suitable body for this kind of operation. In terms of financing the festival, the Council did not feel that the outlay would be great and even predicted a profit. Most of the performance in opera, ballet and drama would be given under the individual management of the theatres and concert halls involved, and could be arranged as part of a normal programme. The programme would, they said, probably be arranged directly by the festival organisation, but the receipts for these could be expected to balance, in many cases, with the expenditure, and the total net expenditure on a cultural festival would, they predicted, be under £250,000. The Arts Council concluded their report by stating that to organise such a project they would need their resources of finance and manpower

vastly augmented.[60]

The proposals presented by the Arts Council were further discussed at a meeting on 16 April 1947 between H.A. Marquand, now the Paymaster General and acting on behalf of the Lord President, and the members of the RSA, the initial advocates of a celebration in 1951. At this meeting four tentative proposals were discussed. It was decided that there should be a festival of arts, a film festival, an exhibition of industrial design and an exhibition of science and technology. Following this decision, the next subject discussed at the meeting was the whole role envisaged for the Arts Council in the festival. The members of the RSA felt that it was impractical to grant the Arts Council the sole responsibility for organising the exhibition because the Arts Council's principle function as stated in its Charter was to promote and encourage the fine arts. Therefore, the members rightly concluded it would be difficult for them to arrange an exhibition that would adequately illustrate the impact of science and technology on British society. Nor could it, for that matter, they concluded, mount an exhibition that would show the importance of industrial design. A solution to this problem was provided by Lord Samuel who suggested that a strong central organisation should be created for the life of the exhibition, with a Director General of some standing appointed to organise and direct it.[61] The arguments raised at the RSA meeting about the role of the Arts Council in the proposed exhibition had

60. Ibid.
61. Works 25/7.

been voiced earlier on by other knowledgeable and interested parties. As early as February 1947, Hale of the Treasury wrote to Nicholson acknowledging receipt of the latter's report on the proposals for 1951,

> I note that the Arts Council are cast for the role of staging a cultural exhibition, probably including an exhibition of arts 'and science'. The last two words rather surprised me as the Council's scope under their Royal Charter is "the fine arts exclusively". I have made some inquiry, and I understand that while they are prepared to cover photography and films, which can be held to be "fine arts", they have not so far seen their way to go further; nor do I see how they could do so. They are certainly quite unequipped to stage for example, an exhibition of radar. I suggest that if a science exhibition is to be included in the plans for 1951, you will have to get some other agency to run it.[62]

The position of the Arts Council was further questioned by the Council of Industrial Design. On 24 April 1947, S.C. Leslie, the Director of the Council of Industrial Design, wrote to Nicholson about the proposed plan of the national exhibition. The Council, he said, was quite happy with the proposed layout of the exhibition, but wondered whether they could, in view of their experience in mounting the "Britain Can Make It" Exhibition, contribute to the exhibition display of the other sections which, he said, was closely allied to industrial design. However, there were some parts of the proposed role of the Arts Council that needed to be clarified: for example, he said that the Council did not accept the view that books should be displayed as cultural items and not as items of industrial design, as would be done in an Arts Council plan. They had already been exhibited in the "Britain Can Make It" exhibition and were a

62. Cab 124/1331, Hale to Nicholson, 20 February 1947. The Arts Council were, however, prepared to handle the science exhibition with the help of specialised advice by 14 March 1947. See p.29.

part of the history of industrial design. He further added that, "there will be a no man's land between the exhibition of science and technology and those sections of the industrial design exhibition which will deal with new industrial processes and technical developments.[63]

Leslie concluded his letter by drawing Nicholson's attention to a proposed press statement which highlighted very clearly the fundamental problem. This statement, he said, gave the impression that the celebrations for 1951 were to consist of a festival of arts with exhibitions of industrial design and science as subsidiary appendages of this. He continued:

> It is felt that some care should be taken to put this matter in proper perspective, with no suggestion that one aspect is subordinated to the others, and especially - in view of the country's industrial and commercial problems - that the anniversary of 1851 is not to be marked in a way that accords anything less than top priority to industrial production.[64]

63. Cab 124/1331, Leslie to Nicholson, 24 April 1947.
64. Ibid.

TOWARDS A FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

The results of the meeting at the RSA were presented to the Lord President and from them he was able to draw up four detailed proposals:

(1) that there should be a festival of arts promoted by the Arts Council.

(2) a film festival, showing predominantly British films, should be sponsored by the British Film Institute.

(3) an industrial design exhibition, to be run by the Council of Industrial Design.

(4) a separate science and technology exhibition should be organised by the COI.[65]

In November 1947, Morrison presented these proposals to the Lord President's Committee.[66] Pleading the case for acceptance of the greatly limited proposals, Morrison acknowledged the country's poor economic climate and the cuts in the investment programme made necessary by the financial crisis in the summer.[67] He told his colleagues that he realised that all hopes for any permanent buildings to house the exhibitions must be abandoned and even temporary buildings appeared to be beyond the nation's resources. He stressed, however, that he felt that to abandon all attempts to celebrate the exhibition would be a mistake. Cancellation of the celebrations would, he said, not only cause the country to forego a

65. Work 25/7.
66. Cab 124/1252.
67. The financial and economic climate of the nation will be discussed fully in Chapter 4.

good deal of foreign exchange but, of greater significance, would cause a severe blow to the country's prestige abroad:

> I am sure with ingenuity and careful planning it ought still to be possible to house a really worthwhile show. We might in fact make a virtue of necessity and evolve a new type of Great Exhibition and get away from the mammoth shows such as Paris and New York of which people are beginning to tire.[68]

His colleagues, knowing the importance of 1851 and the absolute necessity, in spite of adversity, of celebrating this auspicious date, accepted his arguments and on 28 November 1947, they approved the proposals for celebrating the Centenary of 1851.[69] They further asked Morrison to set up a committee "to exercise general supervision over the arrangements for 1951".[70] On 5 December 1947, the Lord President announced in the House of Commons that although the idea of holding an international exhibition had to be abandoned, the Government felt in all wisdom that:

> It would not be right on this account to abandon the celebration of the centenary, and we therefore propose to mark it by a national display illustrating 'the British contribution to civilization, past, present and future; in Arts, in Science and Technology and in Industrial Design.' My Right Hon. friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is, therefore, inviting the Arts Council of Great Britain to make arrangements in association with other bodies concerned, for a Festival of the Arts in 1951. The Festival would not be confined to London, and provision will be made to link up with it existing ventures in Edinburgh and elsewhere, and to encourage new ones. Wales, for example, must play its part, The Festival will include events in Music and Drama, Opera and Ballet, together with exhibitions of painting, sculpture and photography. Separate consideration will be given in due course to arrangements covering architecture and town planning in its design aspects; books, and the showing of notable British films, including documentaries. Besides the Festival, there will be two major national exhibitions. My Right Hon. friend, the President of the Board of Trade, is inviting the Council of Industrial Design to sponsor a first-rate design

68. Cab 124/1332, Memo by Lord President to Lord President's Committee, November 1947.
69. Work 25/7.
70. Cab 124/1252.

display which will include consumer goods, civil transport, certain classes of capital goods and some handicraft production, and some displays showing the historical development of some industries. I am arranging for an exhibition of British achievement in science and technology to be organised by the Central Office of Information on behalf of the Research Councils and other scientific bodies. Both the Festival and the Exhibitions will be held in existing buildings. Provision will be made for co-ordination between these projects. They will cover, at a national level, the field of the 1851 Exhibition and will, I believe, mark its Centenary as worthily as our resources will allow.[71]

The Opposition and the nation appeared to be well pleased with the Government's decision, not a murmur of disapproval with the proposed celebrations was heard inside or outside of the House. A title was even given to this new exhibition - Morrison suggested to Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister, who concurred wholeheartedly that the exhibition should henceforth be known as "The Festival of Britain 1951".

71. Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Series, 445 (1947-8), pp.691-695.

CHAPTER 2

THE SETTING UP OF THE FESTIVAL ORGANISATION

THE FORMATION OF THE FESTIVAL OFFICE

Morrison, having publicly committed the Government to hold the Festival, instructed his staff to formulate plans and ideas pertinent to the execution of the project. He was emotionally involved in the scheme and knew the precise ambience he wanted to create for this particular event. In his position, he was acutely cognisant of the difficulties endured by the people during the war and in the post-war period. In his thinking, the people, after so much stress, deserved a 'lift'. His primary concern therefore, was that the final product should be populist, popular and successful.[1] The criteria having been set, the Minister left the business of detail to his staff. In his vision of events there would be people dancing and enjoying themselves. The Great Exhibition Centenary Celebration was a good excuse, it would serve as the more serious element in an attempt to cheer the people up.

After the euphoria of a Labour victory in 1945, there followed a strong desire on the part of the Government to live up to the expectations of the people. Morrison, in accepting responsibility for the Festival of Britain realised that his personal standing, as Minister in charge was at stake. Whatever decisions were made, had in the finality to show the Festival as a success.

To ensure the fulfillment he needed, he entrusted the day to day responsibility and management of the project to the hands of his

1. Nicholson, Interview, 20 January 1948.

Under-Secretary, Max Nicholson, who was a temporary Civil Servant and was one of his most brilliant advisers. The fact that Nicholson was not a part of the normal Civil Service structure was important to Morrison who disliked and mistrusted the civil service and had earlier refused to have a civil servant in charge of the project.[2]

Career Civil Servants give the impression, especially at higher levels, of being a formidable phalanx, guarding against intrusion from outside. With the Labour victory of 1945, they might have felt the necessity to be vigilant regarding any departures from the norm. Having suspicions on both sides, it was important from the outset that maximum co-operation and esprit de corps should be established between career Civil Servants and those seconded to the Service by reason of specialist qualifications or qualities of a type needed in ventures of this kind. Team work was essential from the outset. In December 1947, the Great Exhibition Centenary Committee was set up by Morrison: the Official Committee, as it became known, was chaired by Nicholson and included representatives of the Ministries of Works, Town and Country Planning, Education and Health, as well as of the Foreign Office, the Treasury, the Board of Trade, the Scottish Office and the Office of the Lord Privy Seal. Officially, the function of this Committee was to "exercise general supervision over the arrangements for celebrating the Centenary of the 1851 Exhibition, with the help and guidance of the Lord President's Council."[3] Unofficially, Nicholson, as Chairman,

2. Ibid.
3. Work 25/7. For more information on the members of this committee see Annex 1.

interpreted the Committee's role as that of preventing any disasters, financial or otherwise, which might embarrass the Government. Furthermore, it would ensure that the Festival Organisation, which was being created to manage the Festival, was free to get on with the task, taking note of the various ministries involved but maintaining an independent stance of its own.[4]

Meetings of the Official Committee began soon after its inception in December 1947 and by February 1948, the Committee made the following recommendations on the possible structure of the organisation which would manage the Festival. They proposed that a supervisory body should be appointed to act in an honorary and advisory capacity, which would be known as the Festival Council. It would be composed of high level representatives of the main interests concerned with the Festival, as well as members of the Government, and the Opposition. In addition to this, they advised that subordinate to the Festival Council there should be an Executive Committee to organise the specialised exhibitions of the Festival, which would include representatives from five constituent bodies, with a Director-General in charge. These bodies would be: the Arts Council, arranging the cultural festival; the Council of Industrial Design, arranging the industrial design display; The British Film Institute, organising the film festival; the newly created Science and Technology Council, chaired by an industrialist, Sir Alan Barlow would manage the science exhibition. Added to these was the newly-formed Architecture and Town Planning Council, chaired by Howard V. Lobb.

4. Nicholson, Interview, 20 January 1948.

The decision was taken that architecture should be given some prominence in the Festival, in view of its importance to Britain as a post-war country involved in the necessities of reconstruction, building and town planning. The proposals for the Architecture Exhibition were developed by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning with the assistance of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Its main theme, they appropriately decided, was to be, "Reconstruction and Redevelopment."[5] In addition to these bodies, one more group was added: the National Book League was asked to arrange the book exhibition in conjunction with the Arts Council and the COID. Anne Moore, the Festival Officer responsible for the League, was to liaise with the Executive and the Festival Organisation but, unlike the other constituent bodies' representatives, she did not sit on the Executive.[6] The Executive Committee would be responsible to the Festival Council for the organisation of the Festival and for co-ordinating the work of the constituent bodies. The Festival Council would also function in part, as a mediator between the Executive, the Official Committee and the Lord President.[7]

5. Work 25/7, See Annexes 1A-F for list of members of these constituent bodies.
6. Cab 124/1334, Executive Committee Minutes, 4 March 1948. See pp.34-36 for the problems between the Arts Council and the COID on the exhibition of books. Further refer to Annex 1F for the list of members of the National Book League.
7. Work 25/7.

THE SELECTION OF THE FESTIVAL ORGANISATION'S OFFICERS

The Official Committee had two priorities: to find a suitable Chairman for the Festival Council, and to recruit talented members to complete the team. The more urgent of the two was, however, to engage the most appropriate chairman. Included amongst those considered for this position were: Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke; Lord Brabazon of Tara; Lord Courthope; Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cunningham of Hyndhope; Earl De La Warr; the Duke of Devonshire; General Lord Ismay; Lord Leathers; Lord Halifax; Lord Rothschild; Lord Walkden; Lord Weir; and Lord Mountbatten.[8] All of the men considered for this job seemed to share a similar social background and at least four of them had held positions of resonsibility during the Second World War. The inclusion of military men in this Civic undertaking was quite natural, for, like politicians, the military were perceived as national figures who were known and admired by a public still rejoicing over the country's victory in war. Consequently these men became identified alongside the great politicians, led by Churchill, who more than any other, brought the identity of the soldier and the politician to a high level of public regard at that period in history. The inclusion of military men as eligible candidates for running the Festival, did not stop with the proposed appointment of the Chairman of the Festival Council. It was, rather the beginning of a military strain that would run throughout the Festival Organisation. Most of the men appointed to

8. Cab 124/1214, Nicholson to the Lord President, 25 February 1948.

the Executive Committee, as well as the architects and designers eventually selected to design the Festival exhibitions and structures, had served in the forces during the war. The training they had received from their military experience stood them in good stead during the hectic months of planning, organisation and action between 1948 and culminating with the opening of the exhibition in 1951. As Bevis Hillier and Mary Banham explain in their book, "A Tonic to the Nation", the war had given them training,

> in both long-term planning and the art of making ad hoc decisions; had taught them how imperative was clear communication throughout the organisation; to know their exact rank and to do what they were told. Instant decision, instant obedience.[9]

Initially the most promising candidate on the list appeared to be Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke. His appeal lay not only in his undoubted social status but, as Max Nicholson explained:

> He had proved himself a first-rate Chairman, able to keep the peace in all circumstances, without involving himself in too much detail ..... he is also very unassuming and an easy man to get on with and can be relied on not to create difficulties.[10]

Of the other Lords mentioned, it was said of Lord De La Warr and General Lord Ismay that they "seemed most promising although neither are in the same class as Lord Alanbrooke".[11] The Official Committee thought that it was highly unlikely that Lord Mountbatten would commit himself to the Chairmanship because he was very involved with the details of Indian Independence and the partitioning of that Country.

9. Mary Banham and Bevis Hillier, "A Tonic to the Nation, p.14.
10. Cab 124/1214, Max Nicholson to the Lord President, 25 February 1948.
11. Ibid.

On 10 March 1948, the Lord President appointed General Lord Ismay as Chairman of the Festival Council. Ismay was invited to see the Prime Minister and the Lord President; a meeting, he explained in his memoirs, that he attended with great trepidation for fear of being asked to undertake some overseas appointment.[12] He said that Attlee quickly dispelled his anxieties by explaining the Festival of Britain project and asking him to undertake the Chairmanship of the Festival Council. Of this request, Ismay said:

> It seemed a very unsuitable assignment for one who was a complete ignoramus about the arts; but I was so relieved at not being asked to go abroad again, that I accepted at once.[13]

As the project evolved it became clear that Ismay as he himself mentioned was not endowed with either remarkable insight or great powers of creative brilliance. He was highly dependent, therefore on the guidance from better informed men, with whom he was surrounded, to provide him with all the relevant information upon which he could then act. Ismay was not going to bring a wealth of ideas or vision to the project, but what he would be able to contribute was reliability, trustworthiness and the leadership qualities of a high-ranking solder.[14]

12. General Lord Ismay, "The Memoirs of General Lord Ismay", p.448. Ismay had been involved in the negotiations of Indian Independence and the settlement of the partition issue, and as such, he had been out of Britain for some time.
13. Ibid., p. 448
14. Sir Huw Wheldon, Interview held at 120 Richmond Hill, Richmond. 29 January 1983.

Ismay's appointment to a position, which while being administrative required some creative ability, might at first have appeared as foolhardiness on the part of the Government. It was, in fact, a tactical manoeuvre by the Lord President and Nicholson. Churchill, still smarting from the Conservative's defeat in 1945, was a stern critic of the policies of the Labour Government and had singled out the Festival for some of his most vituperative attacks which fortunately, although they had come to the attention of Morrison and his staff, were so far being made in private.[15] In view of Churchill's undeniable reputation and stature, they were afraid that if he proceeded to make such criticisms in public, the project would be destroyed before it had even been given a chance to prove its worth. Morrison and his staff decided that in order to stimulate the idea of the Festival in the minds of the people, it must be given a chance to develop without the barbed comments of Winston Churchill. The appointment of Ismay who had not only been Churchill's wartime Chief of Staff but a man with whom Churchill seemed to have a special relationship, might it was thought provide some check on his attacks on the Festival.[16] This appointment did not, however, stop Churchill and the Conservative Party from finding another outlet for their mounting criticism of the Festival. Through Lord Beaverbrook's newspapers, The Daily Express and The Evening Standard , criticism bordering at times on

15. Banham and Hillier, p.29.
16. Nicholson, Interview, 20 January 1948.

denigration continued.[17] In a measure, Ismay's appointment did, however, stop the criticism from the one man who not only Morrison, but to a large extent the nation regarded as a powerful and persuasive orator. His ability to blend language, style and content into a forceful speech might sap the enthusiasm and will to see the Festival through. The other members appointed to the Festival Council by the Lord President were: representing the diverse world of theatre, Noel Coward, who was later to resign due to pressures of work, and John Geilgud; music was represented by Sir Malcolm Sargent; representing the world of art were Sir Kenneth Clark, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, and the Chairman of the Arts Council, Sir Ernest Pooley; representing science was Sir Robert Robinson; Design, Dr R.S. Edwards, Chairman of the COID; Architecture, Sir Patrick Abercrombie and H.V. Lobb; Literature, T.S. Eliot and Sir A.P. Herbert; the Church was represented by the Very Reverend A.C.Don; and the political parties were variously represented by R.A.Butler (Conservative), Walter Elliot (Conservative), Margaret Herbison (Labour), Lady Megan Lloyd George (Liberal), Lord Clydesmuir (Conservative), Thomas Johnston (Labour), Jean Mann (Labour), Sir Roland Nugent (Unionist), Lord Wilmot (Labour)and Lord Latham (Labour).[18] The Official Committee had now to turn its attention to finding the right team to create and manage the Festival.

17. From 1949 to 1950 the conservative newspapers, the Daily Mail, the Daily Express and the Evening Standard, published highly critical and provocative articles. See Annex 1G.
18. Work 25/3, The Story of the Festival of Britain 1951. For the full list of the forty members who made up the Council, see Annex 1H.

By January 1948, the Arts Council was still resisting the Offical Committee's proposal that an Executive Committee should be formed to manage the exhibitions. On 8 January 1948, Mary Glasgow sent a letter to E. Hale of the Treasury who was assisting Nicholson in drawing up a list of nominees for the post of Director-General of the proposed Executive Committee. The letter stated:

> It is the view of the Executive (of the Arts Council) that the nomination of a Chief Executive Officer of the top council to take the chair at meetings of the organising body, should, if possible be postponed. They do not, at the moment, feel convinced of the need for such a high-powered officer as is suggested and, while they appreciate the purpose for which he would be required as the plans for the festivities take shape, they would like to suggest that the appointment should be made nearer the time, perhaps a year hence, when some of the preparatory work has been done. [19]

This however, was neither the view of the Official Committee nor that of the COID who had objected strenuously to the initial role the Arts Council was to play in the proposed national exhibition. The COID not only accepted the Offical Committee's proposal for an Executive Committee, but was forthcoming with suggestions for possible nominees. On 12 January 1948, the Director of the COID, Gordon Russell wrote to Max Nicholson on this matter:

> My Council are of the opinion that by far the most important matter which is likely to affect them at this stage is the appointment of the Chairman of the small Executive Committee. The Council feels most strongly that he should be an administrator rather than one who has a considerable knowledge of either the arts or industrial design and would like to suggest the possibility of filling the post with someone of the calibre of Lord Ismay, Sir Cecil Weir or General Slim. [20]

By 19 January 1948, the Arts Council, perhaps sensing defeat and domination by the COID, changed its mind and let it be known that

19. Cab 124/1214, Glasgow to Hale, 8 January 1948.
20. Ibid. Russell to Nicholson, 12 January 1948.

they now accepted the need for a Director-General and that their preference lay, unlike the COID's stipulations, with someone who possessed a real understanding and knowledge of arts and sciences.[21]

As in the case of the search for the Lord President of the Festival Council, there were many nominees for the post of Director-General. They were: Lord Ismay, recommended by COID; Gerald Barry, nominated by the Ministry of Education and by Mary Glasgow; Sir Guy Locock and Captain J.S. Graham, both nominated by the Board of Trade; J. Eaton Griffith and H.V. Rhodes, both nominated by the Treasury; Sir Cecil Weir, nominated by the Scottish Office and the COID; Sir Cyril Radcliffe, nominated by the COI; Sir Miles Thomas and Mr Hynd, both nominated by the Ministry of Town and Country Planning; and General Slim, nominated by the COID.

Nicholson and the Lord President after conferring selected Gerald Barry, a forty-five year old Managing Director of the liberal newspaper, The News Chronicle, who was appointed Director-General of the Executive Committee on 30 March 1948.[22] He was appointed to this position for a number of reasons: Nicholson and Morrison felt he ought to be appointed because he was one of the first persons to suggest celebrating the Centenary of 1851; moreover, he was well-known to Morrison and was also a personal friend of Nicholson, who had worked with Barry as Assistant Editor on The Weekend Review, a newspaper which Barry had founded; perhaps most

21. Cab 124/1214, Nicholson to Padmore, 19 January 1948.
22. See Annex 1I further information on the nominees.

important of all, he was chosen because he was, as Nicholson said, "a great impressario". Both Morrison and Nicholson felt that if the Festival project was to succeed at all, it had to be stimulating and Barry was, they believed, he man who could provide the necessary impetus.[23] Barry was well-liked by his Executive Committee colleagues whom he selected after his appointment, with Nicholson's approval. He was perceived by them as a rather boyish character with an innate sense of fun, lighthearted verging on the lightweight.[24] Barry intended to make 'fun' the by-word of the Festival - Huw Wheldon, a member of the Executive Committee, described him as preferring fireworks to ballet.[25] The Festival Barry envisaged would most definitely appeal to ordinary people.

From the beginning, Nicholson recognised that Barry had a rather cavalier attitude towards life and work, and he realised that he was taking certain risks by pushing for his appointment. Nicholson feared that Barry might be bored by the administrative work that had to be done if the Festival was to succeed. In fact it was, he said later, rather a revelation to him "how well Barry stayed the course, because he was not terribly good at doing a desk job or handling matters concerned with financial management.[26] To protect the Government and the Festival from any embarrassing mishap resulting from Barry's ebullient nature, Nicholson decided to appoint to the Executive, two more solid figures to 'keep an eye' on Barry and to ensure that his conduct of matters connected with the Festival administration was beyond reproach. Bernard Sendall was

23. Nicholson, Interview, 20 January 1984.
24. Wheldon Interview, 29 January 1983.
25. Ibid.
26. Nicholson Interview, 20 January 1984.

thus appointed to the Executive Committee as the Controller of the Festival. Sendall was a rather dull though, trustworthy, civil servant, who had served in the Admiralty, the Treasury and the COI. As the planning of the Festival progressed, Sendall's presence proved to be not only a necessity, but a most fortunate and expedient inclusion. He became the organisational heart of the Festival Headquarters, the man to be relied upon by both sides. He spent two years shielding Barry, who found it tedious both to hold meetings regularly and punctually. Another worrying factor was his inability to present coherent and rational financial plans and budgets - a factor which would become vitally important when the Festival Office would be given its Vote in 1949.[27]

The other person appointed by Nicholson to a position of responsibility was G.A. Campbell, as the Director of Finance and Establishments. Nicholson knew that Campbell was, like Sendall, a solid and sound civil servant. James Gardner, designer of the Battersea Pleasure Gardens, described Campbell as "very much a Scot with fierce eyebrows and aggressive nose". His cautiousness with the financial arrangements for the Festival earned him the nickname of "Old Moneybags" by the creative section of the committee who were not themselves civil servants.[28]

The other members of the Executive Committee selected by Barry and Nicholson were representatives of the five constituent Councils of Art, Science, Architecture, Industrial Design, and the British

27. In April 1949, the Festival Office was made a separate Government department, for the life of the project. As such it had its own vote and therefore became accountable to Parliament for the money spent on the project.
28. Banham and Hillier, p.120.

Film Institute. These men were selected not only for their competence, but in the main, they seemed to have a compatability with Barry. Huw Wheldon represented the Arts Council while Ian Cox, the Director of Science and Technology Council, was responsible for all the science exhibitions in the Festival. He was described as being humourless and rather missionary like in his approach to the Festival. Cox did not appear to typify the norm on the committee. All of the members had a certain dedication, but Ian Cox pursued his task with overwhelming zeal. His paramount desire, not only for the Science Exhibition but for all the Festival exhibitions, was that they would manage to educate and celebrate simultaneously.[29] Cox's missionary zeal and seriousness was clearly highlighted in a letter from Barry to Cox concerning the latter's handling of the theme of the Festival of Britain. Barry said:

> My main criticism - if that is the word - is rather a fundamental one. I recognise the difficulty well enough but I have a fear lest the whole approach may be too serious, too scholastic. We must remember that while we are out to tell a consecutive story, which is in itself a serious and, indeed, an 'educative' one, we are also, and primarily out to entertain simple people who will go to the exhibition in the expectation of enjoying themselves, and who will only imbibe such message or moral as we have to offer if they do so, so to speak, by accident and unawares. People simply will not go to an exhibition to learn a lesson, however perfectly it may be told. Offered a choice even between the Express and Mirror they choose the Mirror in the ratio of ten to one; I am therefore convinced that we must avoid being too serious and too historical, even possibly at some sacrifice of continuity (in any case the limitations of space will force us to be ruthlessly selective). I may have got the wrong impression, for I don't pretend to have fully digested this long and exceedingly thoughtful document, but I rather got the impression that it places somewhat undue emphasis on the past at the expense of the future.[30]

29. Sir Paul Wright, Interview held at 3 Ormonde Gate, London, 5 January 1983.
30. Work 25/21, Barry to Cox, 26 April 1949.

In addition to devising the theme for the Science Exhibition, Cox devised the theme for the Festival as a whole based on the abstract ideas discussed by the Executive Committee. Hugh Casson was appointed Director of the Council for Architecture, Town Planning and Building Research. He was given the job because, he explained, "As an impecunious architect I'd moonlighted, doing journalism: I used to write 'what to do with that cupboard under the stairs' .... and I wrote for Gerald Barry in the 'News Chronicle' on the future of architecture and all that sort of stuff."[31] Gordon Russell, the Director of the COID chose to represent the interests of industrial design himself, and Denis Forman of the British Film Institute was selected to represent the Institute as the Director with a seat on the Executive. Apart from the constituent representatives to the Executive, the other members included: Paul Wright who, having previously been the Director of Public Relations at the National Coal Board, was appointed the Director of Publicity. Cecil Cooke of the COI Exhibitions Division was appointed Director of Exhibitions, and Leonard Crainford, the former General Manager of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, was recommended by the Arts Council. In view of his experience in managing arts festivals, and his early associations with the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts (CEMA - the forerunner to the Arts Council), he was appointed as Secretary to the Executive Committee.

The men chosen by Barry to form the Executive Committee, as

31. Banham and Hillier, p.15.

has been mentioned earlier, were for the most part known to him, largely as friends and personal acquaintances. The Executive Committee thus ended up resembling a cross between an old boy's network and a private club. Barry's selection methods have been defended by his ex-colleagues, like Hugh Casson, who acknowledged that the Executive Committee was inbred, but explained that this was because the Committee had a very short time in which to produce the Festival, and therefore it was vital, he said, that all Committee members spoke the same language for there was no room for different objectives, all objectives and opinions had to be clear and unanimous from the outset.[32]

Having successfully appointed the basic elements of a central organisation for the Festival, the Official Committee concluded its business in this area after creating three regional councils. The Arts Council's initial idea that the cultural festival should not be based solely in London but taken to other parts of the country, had impressed Nicholson and the Lord President who announced this intention in his statement to the House of Commons on 5 December 1947.[33] Both men wished to avoid the criticism that once again London was getting the lion's share of events and, furthermore, they wanted the Festival to be a nationwide event. To this end, in February and March 1948, the Official Committee developed proposals to create three regional councils, for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. On 20 May 1948, The Secretary of State for Scotland, the

32. Sir Hugh Casson, Interview held at 60 Elgin Crescent, London, 29 November 1982. See Annex 1J for the members of The Executive Committee.
33. See pp. 38-39.

Right Honourable Arthur Woodburn, announced the formation of the Scottish Committee: Joseph Westwood, Secretary of State for Scotland, was appointed as Chairman but, unfortunately, soon after the Committee's first meeting on 18 June 1948, he died and was replaced by the Right Honourable Thomas Johnston, Secretary of State for Scotland (1941-45). The Festival Committee for Wales was also appointed in May 1948 and was chaired by Sir Wynn Wheldon, father of Huw Wheldon, the Arts Council's representative to the Executive Committee. The Government of Northern Ireland appointed the Northern Ireland Festival Committee in November 1948, under the Chairmanship of the Right Honourable Sir Roland Nugent.[34] The purpose of these Committees was, with the help of the Festival Organisation, to ensure that the regional festivals developed the ethos of the Festival theme in their respective cities, thereby ensuring that those who could not travel to London would at least experience the essence of the Festival message, and also some of its activities.[35]

Of all the committees appointed, however, the most important was undoubtedly the Executive Committee and its offshoot, the Presentation Panel which was created by Gerald Barry. The Presentation Panel was created at a meeting of the Executive Committee on 20 May 1948. It was decided that it would be necessary for the Director-General to set up a "creative" or presentation panel which would be responsible to the Executive. The function of

34. Cab 124/1252.
35. Work 25/3. A list of names of the persons who formed these regional committees is given in Annex 1K.

this panel would be to translate the theme of the Integrated Exhibition as well as for all the exhibitions that had been agreed to so far. In addition, it would be responsible for overseeing the design and display treatment of all the Festival exhibitions and events throughout the country. Within this new framework, the role of the COID was reduced in scale. Originally, the COID was to be solely responsible for the mounting of a separate industrial exhibition, and because of their wide experience they would help organise the design and mounting of the Science and Technology and the Architectural Exhibitions. In this new plan, to which the COID agreed only after a great deal of hesitation, because it would mean giving up the considerable executive responsibility initially given to them, they would now be just a part of a team. They would only be responsible for making an approach to industry to elicit participation in the necessary Festival exhibitions, for choosing all industrial exhibits to be displayed and for selecting all the "furniture" for all the exhibitions. Further the COI, the Government's exhibitions mounters would be in charge of arranging the work for the exhibitions to be undertaken by the appropriate builders, technicians and designers.[36]

Both the Executive Committee and the Presentation Panel, were ultimately responsible for shaping and visualising the theme of the Festival: "Britain's contribution to Civilisation past, present and future. in the Arts, Science and Technology, and Industrial Design". The Presentation Panel included: Gerald Barry, Chairman; Misha Black, of the COI Exhibition Division who was one of the finest and

36. Cab 124/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 20 May 1948.

most experienced exhibition designers in Europe; Ian Cox, the Director of the Science and Technology Council and originator of the festival theme; Anthony Hippisley Coxe of the COID, who was a former features editor on the News Chronicle; Mark Hartland Thomas, also of the COID, James Holland of the COI; Ralph Tubbs, an architect who had advised the News Chronicle on architecture and therefore, like Hippisley Coxe, knew Barry personally; James Gardner, another brilliant wartime exhibitions designer, who had been Chief Designer on the successful "Britain Can Make It" exhibition of 1946; and Peter Kneebone of the COI, who was appointed Secretary of the Panel.[37]

The importance of the Presentation Panel cannot be over-emphasised. In conjunction with the COID, it would be responsible for the composition, design and content of all the Festival exhibitions, as well as for the visual aspect of all the festival projects. Ultimately these two bodies would create and approve the "Look" that would become known as the Festival Style. All the members of the Executive and the Presentation Panel knew each other well, some having worked together for Barry on the News Chronicle, others having worked closely together designing exhibitions or creating camouflage during the war years under the auspices of the Ministries of War and Information and the COI. Others had formed associations through membership of the Modern Architectural Research Society (MARS), a group formed in the Thirties which was committed to spreading the ideas of modern

37. United Kingdom, Central Office of Information, CL 593 - October 1948 to May 1949.

architecture, not only to those already familiar with forms of architecture, but to the public at large. As a result of these varied early associations, they all seemingly spoke the same intellectual and creative language which enabled them to present an uncommon uniformity of ideas in a short space of time.

The members of the Executive Committee were in some ways similar to the men who surrounded Herbert Morrison: for the most part, they were intelligent, middle-class intellectuals with left-wing sympathies.[38] They have been described by Michael Fryan, in his study of the Festival, as:

> the do-gooders, readers of the News Chronicle, The Guardian and The Observer, the signers of petitions: the backbone of the BBC. In short they were herbivores or gentle ruminants, who look out from their natural station in life with their eyes full of sorrow for less fortunate creatures, guilty of their advantages though not usually ceasing to eat the grass.[39]

Perhaps this criticism might seem somewhat harsh but these men, steeped in paternalistic philosophy were determined not only to protect and care for the ordinary man, but they were also going to make his drab existence more worthwhile. It was this philosophy that they would infuse into the Festival project as it took shape, it would become apparent that their aim would be not only to allow the people to celebrate, releasing themselves from their lethargy, but to present them with an alternative novel secular ideology. In short, their aim was to open opportunities to people towards a new concept of themselves, their nation and a future shaped by the achievements the Festival demonstrated.

For the members of the Festival Organisation, work officially

38. Casson, Interview, 29 Novemer 1982.
39. Michael Fryan, "Festival", The Age of Austerity, pp.319-320.

began on 30 March 1948, appropriately in the headquarters of the Royal Society of Arts, in the very rooms where the 1851 Exhibition was planned and executed. (The Festival Organisation would later move its operations to its own offices in Savoy Court). No inauguration, however, could be complete without an official opening ceremony and this took place on 31 May 1948 at the RSA in the presence of its President, Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth. At the opening, all the expectations reflected in the speeches made by the Princess, the Lord President, General Ismay, and Gerald Barry, showed that the Festival, though modest in conception, was not only rapidly growing in stature but was being perceived as the channel through which varied aspirations could be achieved. It was going to be used as a vehicle through which Britain, though physically exhausted by the effort of winning the war, and coupled with rumblings from her overseas territories, would move towards a persona infused with a new sense of power. To understand this need more fully, it is necessary to examine the nature of British power during the preceding century. The wars during Queen Victoria's reign were more localised. Weaponry by 1939 was more sophisticated. The horror of war was brought into the homes of millions. The scope of disarray widened, the causes tended to linger on, into other mini-wars. The world had changed in every way understood by what was then regarded as "civilised man".

Added to this the emergence of nationalistic philosophies in non-western nations threatened a way of life and thought, instigating disquiet and insecurity into an hitherto well-ordered view of a nation in command.

In 1939 it was still possible for the British to think in

terms of Empire: India was placed in the war by Britain without her consent, as the "keystone of imperial defence". In 1941, The Times quoted Lord Lloyd as saying that: "the moral and material resources of the British Empire are virtually inexhaustible". In 1942 in Egypt the Abdin Palace in Cairo was surrounded with armoured cars by the British Ambassador who delivered an ultimatum to King Farouk.[40] By 1945, the facade of invincible might appeared to have suffered serious structural damage. In India, as the Constituent Assembly arranged by the British Cabinet Mission met, the Raj was fast sinking under the weight of communal rioting, tramcar burning, and acid throwing through the streets of Burma, Bombay, Bengal and Bihar. In Egypt, the negotiations for the renewal of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty were deadlocked and there were anti-British riots in Alexandria and Cairo. Added to these issues was the baffling and humiliating problem of Palestine and a home for the displaced Jewish refugee population. For many months British soldiers, civil servants and policemen, striving only to keep the peace and reconcile the irreconcilable, had been shot at, blown up, kidnapped - and in one notorious case, flogged - by the highly efficient terrorists of the Stern Gang and Irgun.[41] Everywhere the British looked that year (1945), "The Pax Britannica, which in the unconscious of many Britons was still almost a part of the order of nature, was breaking up under one's eyes. Everywhere there was a sliding loss of control".[42]

Against this background of unrest and rebellion with a

40. Hopkins, The New Look, p.59.
41. Ibid., p.59.
42. Ibid., p.59.

Government teetering between Imperialism and Democratic Socialism, unsure as to which ideology was better suited to the present needs of Britain; the nation was becoming infected by a sense of a lack of direction and purpose. On the whole, therefore a general decline in self-confidence was creeping into the fabric of society. Wearied by a demanding war, troubled by the changing world, the people needed to be resuscitated. It seemed a good idea to do something to lift the spirit of the nation and to rekindle that 'unconquerable mind' of past years. It was necessary to show to tired people something beyond the drabness of their present - why not then remind them of the enormity of their past achievement in the hope that this might be a stimulus to their present and future? Thus, between 1948 and 1949 the Festival planners grew to realize that the country's dilemma demanded a spectacle that would give a new vision as well as a tangible demonstration of well-being which would raise the morale of the nation.

It was against this background that the British people needed to secure a place for their identity, and in the face of the grim realities of austerity-ridden, post-war Britain, it was hoped that the Festival would encourage and enliven the public, and divert their attention from the oppressive realities of shortages and economic problems to the long-term possibility of optimism in the future. In short, the Festival was to be, as Barry aptly put it, "a tonic to the nation". Moreover, it was hoped that the Festival could be used as a means of re-evaluation, redirecting and re-establishing Britain's now seemingly tenuous position in the Western world, by displaying with pride, her achievements of the past and present and, much more importantly, by signposting her

future potentialities. These sentiments were clearly expressed at the inauguration by Princess Elizabeth who said that the Festival,

> will be designed to display to our own people and to visitors from all over the world what a wealth of ideas and achievements Great Britain has produced in the realm of art and science. [43]

She went on to emphasise the virtue in troubled times of dwelling on the arts of peace and stressed, moreover, that Britain had provided continuity and permanence through her contributions to the store of human happiness and knowledge. Furthermore, she added, "we have certainly not forfeited our opportunities of leadership in the world of ideas". Princess Elizabeth encouraged the men of the Festival Organisation to show a breadth of vision and courage, and to ensure that "1951" would stress sharply Britain's responsibility to the future; "then the Festival of Britain 1951, may prove to be not simply an end in itself but a beginning of many good things". [44]

In the Lord President's speech he began by placing the responsibility for the project firmly on the shoulders of the Festival Organisation. He said:

> The Government looks to the Council to decide, within the framework (British contribution to civilisation, past, present and future) the shape the Festival shall take. How far, for instance, is it to look backward and how far forward. It will want, I am sure, to look back to 1851 and dwell on the progress made since then. But I hope it will look forward also to the further advances in the arts of peace which are just beginning to develop and which ought to be encouraged.[45]

The Lord President continued by explaining that the Festival was going to be a national, nationwide enterprise. This intention could already be seen by the nature of the Festival Council which, he

43. Work 25/7, 31 May 1948.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.

said, was not only representative of the varied national interests concerned with the Festival but also with members of Parliament from all parties.

The Lord President went on to state that while the Council was doing its best to create the Festival, the Government would also be doing its best "to find funds for the Festival from national resources". They were prepared to do this despite the limitations on money, labour and materials because, he said, their decision to mark the Centenary of 1851 was quite simply an act of faith:

> of faith in the ability of this country to grapple with the immense economic difficulties with which it is faced; of faith that by 1951, we shall have mastered these difficulties and shall be able to present to the world a smiling face of honest pride in a job well done. If this comes true, the Festival will be a wonderful means of displaying our achievements to ourselves and to the world.[46]

The Lord President added, that it was his belief that if properly handled the Festival would not only by its excellence permanently raise the regard in which British artists, scientists, craftsmen and technicians were held, but it would stimulate dormant skills and talents, thereby, leaving behind at its close, a legacy for the nation. Of this view, he said:

> I hope that, by encouraging from the outset the highest standards of industrial design and by stimulating further initiative in the fields of the sciences and the arts, the Festival itself will contribute to the mastery of the country's economic difficulties, and will besides, leave behind it a rich legacy to the future by establishing the outstanding value of British contribution in these fields.[47]

Fortunately, this view was also shared by Lord Ismay and Gerald Barry who replied to these remarks on behalf of the Festival

46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.

Organisation. Lord Ismay opened his remarks by thanking the Lord President for finding the time amidst this "manifold preoccupations" to come to the launching. This, he said, confirmed his belief that Morrison had a special place in his heart for the Festival and, moreover, was going to be its staunch supporter and friend. Morrison really had very little choice in the matter for as the Minister in charge of the Festival, it had, he believed, to be a success. Thus, he willingly gave the project his full commitment and support. Speaking of the role of the Festival Council, Ismay said:

> Our Festival Council will not itself be directly concerned with trade and industry, but rather with those intangible things that reveal and express the innermost heart and spirit of a nation. Twice in living memory we have not hesitated to take our place in the van in the fight for freedom. Twice, with God's help, we have emerged victorious. Now is our opportunity, as it is our duty, to take up our lives and move forward again in the van - this time in the van of progress in the arts, the sciences and the humanities. [48]

Lord Ismay continued his speech by remarking upon the Lord President's statement that the resources for the Festival would be limited. This he said, did not depress the organisation in the least, for after all, "is it not a challenge to all concerned with the arrangements, and to all our artists, scientists, designers and craftsmen to prove that skill, ingenuity and quality are far more compelling than size, ostentatious splendour of quality". But he warned, "At the same time, I feel sure that neither His Majesty's Government nor the British people would wish us to run the risk of 'spoiling the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar'". He concluded his

48. Ibid.

remarks by stating that the Festival Council were resolved to do their utmost to ensure that 1951 would be a memorable year in the island's story, a time for enjoyment celebrated in the British tradition and at its close a distinctive mark would be left by it on the nation's life for all time.[49]

Gerald Barry, with his gift for phrase-making, was last to speak on behalf of the Executive Committee - the creators of the Festival. He stressed the difficulty of capturing and putting on show something as elusive as British tradition, a challenge that his committee would nevertheless respond to. As Barry perceived it, it would not be enough to think of 1951 in terms of fun for the masses, or for that matter as a show. 1951 must, he said:

> be much more than a year of bigger and better exhibitions, or more and merrier festivals. It ought, as General Lord Ismay so rightly said just now, to leave some mark on our history.[50]

Furthermore, Barry had concrete ideas as to how this could be achieved:

> By the standards we set, by the wealth of talent we disclose, by the recognition which the whole idea of the Festival will give to the central importance of the arts and sciences in the national life, by emphasising their indispensability in the future if we are to maintain and develop our leadership in quality ..... by all these things the Festival should, as I see it, aim to produce tangible and lasting results. Among other things, it should succeed in encouraging more of the right sort of recruits into the Arts and Sciences in the future; in permanently higher standards, and eventually in establishing British supremacy in culture and the humanities. It should also be possible, by judicious commissioning of music and possibly of other works of art, to bequeath to the future a modest addition to our heritage. We should also make it our business to devise other ways by which the Festival can

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.

> leave permanent contributions behind. In short we should not regard 1951 as an end, but as a beginning. It should be not only a year in which we as a team complete our labours, but also a year which is a starting point. [51]

Thus, having publicly outlined the varied high hopes and aspirations held for the Festival, the Festival Organisation settled down to the serious task of devising a theme suited to the image of the Festival which had begun to achieve far greater significance than had been initially envisaged.

51. Ibid.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE THEME AND AIMS OF THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN 1951

In the first week of May 1948, the Executive Committee spent the first of many weekends at Barry's home in West Sussex. Barry had issued the invitations so that the members of the Executive could become better acquainted with one another and "establish a strong team spirit and become united in a common enthusiasm". Barry, describing these meetings, said:

> Weather and company were in their best form. In the daytime we worked on the terrace or paced the lawn in pairs like the Walrus and the Carpenter, trying to marshal the oddly-assorted shoes and ships and sealing-wax at our command into some sort of order and coherence. Below us rolled away in succeeding folds of green and gold a landscape of English parkland inherited from an age of men who had such faith in the future of their country, and so robust a sense of responsibility to their successors, that they planted not for themselves but for their great-grandchildren. Here was our incentive. This successful weekend was followed by others of a similar kind. The team spirit was born. [52]

The Festival of Britain therefore was shaped not only in committee rooms and around tables which Barry and his colleagues found inhibiting, but, "on hilltops, in gardens, around log-fires where half a dozen people could foregather and talk". In these romantic settings the Committee members "breathed, thought, imagined, willed, inhaled and exuded - Festival".[53]

From these meetings, the theme that would become the Festival of Britain was beginning to emerge and take form, and the Executive's natural tendency towards tutoring and paternalism

52. Sir Gerald Barry, "Three Cantor Lectures on the Festival of Britain 1951", Journal of the Royal Society of Arts c (22 August 1952), p.675.
53. Ibid., p.675.

would become increasingly evident. These emergent themes possessed a vision of what the Executive Committee believed Britain in its post-war years could be. The new Britain they perceived would not base its concept of greatness on conquest and power (largely, in fact, because even in this early period, such an idea was rapidly becoming unrealistic) but on culture and the humanities. If this new foundation for greatness was accepted by the British public through the Festival, the Executive Committee believed that the nation would avail itself of this opportunity and reassert its supposed right to lead the world, but this time, in the realm of culture and ideas.[54]

As they saw it, the first step towards achieving their goals was to eliminate the fallacy that the best work of the nation had already been done. They wanted to "stimulate the natural forces within the British people, showing them to be as worthy as the stuff from which their past was made and by pointing out new horizons to them." The Executive acknowledged that in order to do this, some recapitulation of past achievements would be necessary, but this would not be to show that the country's greatest assets lay in the past, nor to pander to the deadly sin of nostalgia, but because:

> the achievements of those days were again the same forces in the British character bursting through barriers such as ignorance, distances, squalor, want, disease and cruelty, which at the time seemed just as opaque as the barriers of the present day.[55]

54. COI, CL593, October 1948-May 1949: This idea of Britain leading the way in culture and the humanities or in the arts and sciences was confirmed by Nicholson in a letter to Gerald Barry. He said, "It (the Festival) is expected to give a great impetus to the Arts and Sciences on which our leadership in the world will more increasingly depend". Cab 124/1334, Nicholson to Barry, 15 April 1948.
55. Ibid.

They perceived that their main task was to give the people direction; they had to be aroused from the slumber of depression. The Festival was going to be an expression of the people's physical, mental and spiritual efforts, made, not by the Executive calling upon the people to repeat the glorious achievements of the past but "by making the old fire we know to be burning in the people blaze up again". Furthermore, they were going to make the people glad to feel the heat of this fire, and as a result, eager to go forward.[56]

Having developed these largely intangible concepts, the Executive was faced with the arduous task of translating them into reality. This, they decided, could be achieved by trying to define the British outlook and tradition, which they perceived to be: love of country; love of freedom; love of nature; tolerance and fair play; pride in craftsmanship; and humanity. These characteristics, though abstractions, were they said, without a shadow of doubt recognizable British traits.[57] In order to begin to translate these highly subjective observations into objective reality, they decided to envisage themselves as salesmen planning a campaign. They asked themselves four basic questions: What exactly were they trying to sell? To whom were they going to sell it? When were they going to sell it?, and how were they going to sell it? What they were going to sell was, of course, the most important question of all.

To find an answer to this most perplexing problem, they began by defining the purpose of the Festival. The Festival was, they

56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.

knew, first and foremost to commemorate the Centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851, and to illustrate a century of progress made since then. Beyond this patently obvious excuse for a celebration, the Festival was to be made an occasion for putting Britain on show and presenting her unique and outstanding contribution to civilisation, past, present and future. This aspect of showing off a Britain, despite being battle-scarred, seemingly uncertain and insecure about a future in a world in a state of flux, was extremely important. It was hoped that the exhibition would alter the way Britain was being perceived in the world, especially by the burgeoning United States which was seen, on the one hand, as treating Britain with her network of Imperial holdings, as an economic rival but, on the other hand, dismissing her as an anachronism with little or no future. Moreover, the Executive hoped that by putting Britain "on show", the people would not only begin to take pride in their heritage but also in themselves and their communities, thereby at least beginning to help themselves, not necessarily in major ways, but in small ways, for example by building the things their communities needed: such as bus shelters, civic centres and concert halls. In short an attempt was being initiated to inculcate the concept of self help into the minds of the people. This concept would be bolstered with the aid of local authorities and councils, as well as various voluntary associatons which would demonstrate with the people's consent, that they could carry out tasks that Central Government was too preoccupied to concern itself with.

Taking all the aforementioned objectives into account, the theme that emerged was the Executive decided, to be found by looking

at "Britain's gift to the civilised world". The exhibition, it was decided would show "the immensely important contribution Britain had made to the betterment of the human race. In short, the underlying theme would be, "one hundred years of British leadership and achievement". Sensing that this kind of theme might be open to misinterpretation, they warned that it must not be obvious, or it would spoil the effect, for there could be no hint of bombast. The appeal of the theme had to be subtle, "so subtle that it will have a subconscious effect on even the most sceptical of minds".[58]

Burdened with a variety of working titles such as, "One Hundred Years", "The Amazing Century", "Salute Britannia", and "Britain Serves", the exhibition was going to be designed to pay tribute to "British skill, invention, culture, craftmanship, technical efficiency, and the sturdiness of the British people which in the last century carried them through two world wars". It was initially thought that each major section would be designed to start with a flashback to 1851, relating the present with the past which would be shown:

> not as a dull page from the history books, but burning with human interest, not things, but people; employing every possible dramatic use of exhibition technique. [59]

In addition to this, there would be sections devoted to displaying "the Britain of the future".

The exhibits would be arranged by subject matter, with the aim of showing them within the context of everyday use. For example, there would be a section on transport and travel which would show

58. Cab 124/1334, Cooke to Barry, 19 April 1948
59. Ibid.

aeroplanes, ships, trains, motorcars, barges, bicycles and also travel goods and travel wear. There would be a homes section showing the exterior and interior of the home. This section would contain examples of good and bad design, as well as old and new household appliances. On display there would be examples of furniture, fabrics, carpets, wallpapers, china, glass, cutlery, table linen, pictures and kitchenware. A health section was envisaged that would show the vast improvements in British health and hygiene since 1851, with displays illustrating the development of some of the many advances and discoveries made during the period, including, penicillin, radiography, blood transfusions, x-rays, sanitation, health centres and clinics. Among other topics to be designed for display included entertainment, the countryside and education.[60]

60. Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

THE SEARCH FOR SITES TO HOUSE THE FESTIVAL EXHIBITION

LOOKING AT EXISTING STRUCTURES AND THE MOVE TO AN OPEN SITE

The abstract ideas that had emerged at the Executive Committee's weekend conference at Barry's home led to important structural changes in the Festival project. After the conference, at a meeting of the Executive on 20 May 1948, the new structure that was unfolding was fully discussed. This had also been discussed in April at meetings of the Official and Executive Committees and it was confirmed that the best way to translate the theme of the British contribution to civilization in the arts and sciences would be by staging a Combined Exhibition which would display industrial design and some aspects of science and of architecture. In addition to this, there would be a separate Exhibition of Science and Technology, an Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning and Building Research, as well as a Travelling Exhibition.[1]

The Committee then turned their attention to discussing the space required for the Combined Exhibition and the possible sites for housing it. It had already been agreed at the weekend conference that the Combined Exhibition would need a minimum of 550,000 square feet to allow ample room for circulation, but they were not certain what the material needs of this exhibition would be. The Executive Committee began reviewing all the buildings in London which they thought might be suitable for the Combined Exhibition and also for the other Festival exhibitions. This was done because the Executive was mindful of the fact that when the Government agreed to some sort of national display, they did so

1. Cab 124/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 20 May 1948. See also pp. 143-7 on the section dealing with decentralisation.

believing that the nation could "host something that would, in Sir Stafford Cripps words, involve relatively little new construction work outside the programme already in the course of planning".[2] On taking charge of the proposed celebrations, the Lord President reiterated the Government's policy towards construction by stating that "no new construction work for the purposes of a national display can be undertaken in 1951", and he emphasised that "the Festival and its exhibitions would be housed in existing buildings".[3] Thus, it appeared that the vogue for extravagance, rather than quality and imagination, which had been so much in evidence in the moneyed exhibitions of New York 1939 and Paris 1937, would not be possible or acceptable in Britain in 1951.

The Government's decision to house the exhibition in its existing buildings was not dictated by frugality or indifference but with the euphoria of victory in war and 'democratic socialism' slowly fading, their decision was governed by the grim realities of post-war life in Britain which was not only presenting the Labour Government with unexpected setbacks, but was a shock for the people who expected greater rewards for their efforts. Filled with the best possible intentions of creating a just and equitable society, the Government was being frustrated by external factors beyond their grasp and control. Between 1947-1950, the country was buffeted about by traumatic downward trends and illusory upward swings. The inclement weather of early 1947 virtually brought production in the

2. See p. 22, Cripps' statement to the House of Commons, 28 March 1947.
3. See pp. 38-9, Morrison's statement to the House of Commons, 5 December 1947.

coal industry to a halt, effectively plunging the country into a state of imobility and semi-darkness. Consequently, there were cuts in the electricity supply which led to enormous temporary unemployment: the Austin Motor Company, for example, shut down production due to the lack of coal and 14,000 people lost their jobs. A further two million men and women were eventually added to the ranks of the unemployed. The situation was also aggravated by poor industrial relations - for example, an unofficial strike by lorry drivers put the meat ration in jeopardy.[4]

For a large part of the nation this state of affairs created a:

> strange, half-life that was to become part of the collective experience of post-imperial Britain ... cold breakfasts by candlelight blacked out streets (lamps, at first half on, were finally wholly extinguished), motionless escalators at the underground. At the office typists muffled in overcoats and rugs tried to operate machines with cold, numb fingers. In the newspapers, Home Page editresses explained the art of cooking by hay box "as grandma used to do".[5]

As each frozen day succeeded another, food not only became scarce but what was available carried a costly tag. Two financial crises in 1946-7 and 1949 exposed the nation's problems in a way that had not been anticipated and by the spring of 1947, both the foreign and domestic press began to write of "a city under siege, of an end of the phoney peace".[6] The Foreign Correspondent of the France Soir wrote, "do you want to see how a besieged city looks, then take a walk through central London today".[7] For the British people another war was beginning and this time it would be fought solely on

4. Hopkins, The New Look, p 74.
5. Ibid., p. 75.
6. Robert Hewison, In Anger, p. 13.
7. Hopkins, p. 75.

the home front. Thus, by 1948, when plans for the Festival were fully under way, the arguments for holding such an event, in light of the country's faltering economic position, seemed untenable. In the midst of planning a celebration of British achievement and way of life, the Government was fighting with Balance of Payments, acute national shortages and inclement weather. So desperate was the situation that:

> as the first of the sahibs and soldiers returned from Nehru's India, they found a Britain whose clocks were plastered over with strips of brown paper, whose fires were out, whose streets were dark, whose railway services were sketchy and uncertain. There was, for some, the sense of a once great nation running down.[8]

It was against this harrowing background that, in order to ensure a fair share for all of the few remaining available resources, rationing was continued and extended (in the most basic areas such as tobacco, clothes, petrol and simple foodstuffs). Furthermore, taxes were raised and there were many cut backs and shortages to contend with, the worst of which was that of housing.[9]

> Substantial numbers of families lived in prefabs; flat-roofed boxes made of asbestos sheeting while rosebay willowherb flowered in purple patches across untouched bombsites.[10]

In this climate, it was impossible for the Government to allow the Festival to assume epic proportions. The members of the Executive and the Festival Organisation, as a whole, were like everyone else living in the grip of austerity and depression and they

8. Ibid., p. 76.
9. Robert Hewison, p. 13. During the war years, very few houses were built in any case, but this was further exacerbated in areas that had suffered bomb-damage - building materials were scarce and housing could not be replaced quickly enough to cope with the numbers of homeless people.
10. Peter Lewis, The 50's, p 11.

therefore realised that their aspirations for the Festival would have to continue within the limits set out by the Government.

The Executive Committee were meanwhile being helped by the Official Committee and the Ministry of Works in the task of reviewing existing buildings for the exhibitions.[11] Having looked at the available buildings, they decided that those best suited to their purpose were Earls Court and Olympia, each of which provided an area of 500,000 square feet. They were, however, informed by Nicholson that both these halls were booked from 30 April to 11 May 1951 by the Board of Trade for the annual British Industries Fair. Of the two halls, Olympia with displays booked for early autumn, he said, was much more heavily booked in 1951 than Earls Court which, on the other hand, appeared to have a free period from the end of May until the middle of September. There would therefore be less of a conflict if the Festival Organisation could obtain Earls Court rather than Olympia for the Festival exhibitions. On receiving this information, Barry proceeded to commission a report by Cecil Cooke, the Director of Exhibitions, on the amount of time the Festival Organisation would require to mount their exhibitions at either Earls Court or Olympia. In his report, Cooke stated categorically that the Festival Organisation would need a minimum period of at least three months to arrange a suitable exhibition at either of the two sites. The 'Britain Can Make It' Exhibition of 1946 which was

11. The Ministry of Works was involved in the search for existing buildings in which to house the Festival's exhibitions because it was the department responsible for the maintenance of national museums and gallery buildings as well as places like Hampton Court Palace. They were also to be responsible for any works which needed to be done in order to make the buildings chosen suitable for the 1951 exhibitions.

held at the Victoria and Albert Museum took nearly three months to install, and it covered only one-fifth of the size of the Festival of Britain's requirements (i.e. 100,000 square feet compared to Festival of Britain's estimated requirement of 500,000 square feet). Further, the small COI exhibitions of 10,000 square feet normally took two months to install. He argued, therefore, that in view of the proposed scope, scale and type of displays the Executive wished to mount, they would need at least six months to accomplish this. He warned that this estimate was made on the assumption that the COI, as the Government's exhibition planners and mounters, could be assured from the very outset that all the necessary materials, labour and transport would be made readily available. Moreover, the COI would want all the materials to be pre-fabricated and stored ready for quick erection. Having mounted the exhibition, Cooke said it would take the COI approximately six weeks to dismantle it.[12]

On receiving this information, Barry wrote to Nicholson saying that on the basis of the report and on information he had received from Cecil Cooke and the COID, he was forced to come to the conclusion that:

> These minimum estimates of three months for mounting are extremely optimistic. If the Festival is to have to make use of existing (by now, almost traditional) exhibition buildings, it must certainly set out to use them in a quite unusual and striking way for 1951, otherwise the Festival could not succeed, on the exhibition side, in living up to the high standards we are setting. It would be fatal for the public to feel that, after all the fanfares, there were to be just another couple of routine exhibitions at Olympia and Earls Court.

Barry said of this poor state of affairs :

> I am strongly of the opinion that an exhibition of exhibitions worthy of the standard we intend to set

12. Cab 124/1334, Barry to Nicholson, 22 April 1948.

> ourselves for 1951 and all of the enterprise and labour they will entail should remain open for a minimum period of four months. It is a normal experience that exhibitions have to extend their period of opening in response to demand. Thus allowing (a maximum of) three months for mounting, six weeks for dismounting, a minimum period of show of four months - the Festival will require occupation of Earls Court and/or Olympia for a minimum period of eight months and two weeks.

Working from a position of tactical strength Barry, through Nicholson, issued the Government an ultimatum. He said:

> We are thus faced with this proposition: that either the Government must be asked to take drastic and immediate action to persuade the parties concerned in existing contracts for Earls Court and Olympia to change their dates or to find alternative accommodation, or the intention to use Earls Court and Olympia for the Festival purposes in 1951 must be abandoned.[13]

The "parties" who were blocking the Festival Organisation's use of these halls were primarily the Board of Trade, the BIF Council of Exhibitors and the Birmingham Council of Management of the BIF. The BIF, an important event in normal circumstances was, in the desperate economic situation of 1948, deemed extremely important by the Government, the Board of Trade, the Council of Exhibitors and of Management. The Government, anxious to balance the nation's payments, saw export as its chief means of achieving this goal. The BIF by promoting export trade would bring in the much-needed foreign currency, and all parties were naturally concerned that nothing, not even the Centenary of 1851, should reduce its effectiveness. The Executive Committee, realising that Britain's export trade was of paramount importance to the beleaguered Government and nation came to the conclusion that care had to be taken not to antagonise Industry, and that the BIF had thus to be seen as both related to

13. Ibid.

and complementary to the Festival and that cancellation in 1951 was, therefore, completely out of the question.[14] This view was communicated to Nicholson by Barry who went on to argue that in view of this attitude, as well as that of the Government's and the Board of Trade's:

> urgent consideration be given to the finding of alternative sites or to the prospects of erecting temporary structures to house the Festival Exhibition 1951.[15]

14. Cab 124/1334, Executive Committee Minutes, 15 April 1948.
15. Ibid. Barry to Nicholson, 22 April 1948.

THE MOVE TO AN OPEN SITE

From as early as 20 May 1948, the Executive confirmed, at a meeting, that whilst looking at existing structures they had also been reviewing and visiting sites in open spaces in central London. Even at this stage they were of the opinion that the Combined Exhibition should be situated on any one of these open sites. In addition to this, they suggested that a funfair be situated below Hungerford Bridge on the South Bank, which was due for redevelopment. The funfair would, they thought, be run independently of the Festival Organisation but would have to conform to their standards. They asked Miss Lidderdale, Secretary to the Official Committee, to submit their views on the need for an open site to the Lord President for his comments, because they were aware that the idea of using an open site in central London for Festival purposes would raise difficulties.[16]

The Executive Committee's next move was to publicly unveil the new ideas for the Centenary celebrations. At the first meeting of the Festival Council on 31 May 1948, Barry explained that on reflection, the Executive felt that if they were to put "The British Contribution to Civilization" on display to the nation and the world, it could be accomplished more attractively and compellingly "by means of a large exhibition covering all the relevant features of our national life rather than by dividing it up somewhat artificially

16. Cab 124/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 20 May 1948.

into related compartments". The Executive had therefore decided:

> to organise a combined (integrated) exhibition covering all those subjects which we are called upon to cover, and this should offer opportunities not only for presenting a truer and more comprehensive picture but also a more interesting and dynamic show than was likely to be achieved by the original plan.[17]

Barry went on to explain that there would be further separate exhibitions on science and technology and architecture. He concluded by saying that he could not yet give any definite information as to where these three exhibitions would be held.

However, the Executive had already advised the Government that to house the Combined Exhibition, it would be necessary either to build in central London on a site yet to be chosen, one large temporary building or a number of smaller ones to equal the total size required. Added to this, the Executive had asked for the use of Earls Court to house the Science and Technology Exhibition. Negotiations had begun with the Board of Trade to persuade them to relinquish their claim to Earls Court in the summer of 1951 and use only Olympia for their annual British Industries Fair, which normally occupied both venues.

The Architecture exhibition had its own problems: it had not yet been decided how large this exhibition would be or how it should be visualised. Barry said that it might possibly be housed in part of Earls Court or alternatively, it might be arranged on a completely different pattern from the other exhibitions and be housed elsewhere either inside or outside London.[18]

17. Work 25/44, 31 May 1948. See pp. 70-73, Consolidation of the Theme and Aims of the Festival of Britain.
18. Work 25/7

This latest idea about where and how the Combined Exhibition and the other exhibitions should be housed had been discussed earlier on 25 May 1948 at a meeting of the Official Committee. Bernard Sendall of the Executive Committee, outlined the Executive's plans for the Festival, stating that they were in favour of using an open park site on which specially-designed and constructed structures would be placed to house the Combined Exhibition. The estimate of 550,000 square feet was, he explained, based partly on an original estimate made by the COID and partly on the view held by the Executive that as the central display for 1951, the Combined Exhibition ought to be the larger and should, therefore, be larger than the 470,000 square feet which the Science and Technology Exhibition would occupy if it were to use Earls Court. Cecil Cooke of the COI and also a member of the Executive Committee, further added that a decision on whether the temporary buildings could be constructed, was required almost immediately as the Executive had become convinced that it would not be possible to present the Combined Exhibition in Dutch barns or standard shedding.[19]

Following these statements, Proctor of the Ministry of Works rightly said that the scheme contemplated by the Executive was a great deal more ambitious than the original plan and, in his opinion, steps should be taken immediately to present the scheme to the Investment Programmes Committee (IPC) in as much detail as possible. The Committee was, he said, presently drawing up a four year investment programme and would be paying specific attention to 1949, when he assumed Festival construction would begin. He further

19. Cab 124/1335, Official Committe Minutes, 25 May 1948.

suggested that a Working Party should be set up to examine the possibilities of alternative temporary structures. The Chairman of the Official Committee, Max Nicholson, wholly concurred with this view and invited the Ministry of Works to set up a Working Party, to be composed of representatives from the Ministries of Town and Country Planning, and of Works, and also the COI, which would examine what types of temporary structures it would be possible to use for both the Festival's Combined Exhibition, and its Architecture Exhibition. The Working Party, he added, would have to bear in mind which materials were in the shortest supply and to assess the re-use value on any of the materials subsequently used. In addition it would also have to report back to the Official Committee as soon as possible so that they could prepare a report based on this information for submission to the IPC.[20]

The Executive Committee meanwhile continued their investigations for a suitable site to house the Combined Exhibition, and at a meeting of the Executive on 24 June 1948, the members discussed a memorandum by the COI which examined the types of schemes the Executive could use for housing the Combined Exhibition in temporary buildings on an open site. The schemes presented in this memorandum were based upon the early estimates drawn up by the Ministry of Works' Working Party. The COI presented three possible schemes: the first, Plan A - envisaged structures composed entirely of standard shedding with one hundred per cent re-use value; the second, plan B - called for a group of buildings made up mainly from standard shedding with some structures being specially-designed for

20. Ibid.

the exhibition and which would have little re-use value; the third, Plan C - presented the Executive with the option of erecting a community of buildings that would be architecturally designed and specifically constructed to house the combined exhibition in 1951, the re-use value here, like Plan B, would be minimal.[21]

The Executive Committee rejected Plan A on the grounds that it was too depressing and unworthy of their enterprise. The choice, they concluded, lay between Plans B and C. Barry explained to his colleagues that if "a scheme based on Plan B could be evolved which was up to Festival standards and which would do credit to Great Britain in the eyes of the world, it should, in his opinion, be adopted". If this was not possible, then the Executive, he said, should not hesitate to endorse Plan C, but Plan C could not in itself be accepted because although it was by far the most preferable, it would be hard to defend such a choice in view of the country's economic difficulties. After weighing and examining all the limitations of Plan B, the Executive concluded that it would be reasonable to assume that the Combined Exhibition could be worthily housed in a group of buildings, sixty percent, (it must be noted lessened by six per cent of the original COI quotation), to be composed of standard structures of probably limited purposes, while forty per cent would be specially-designed for the Festival. This decision, and the reasons for not adopting Plan C were, they said, to be presented to the Government whose permission they needed if they were to erect temporary structures on an open site.[22]

21. Cab 24/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 24 June 1948 and Cab 124/1335, Report by the Official Committee, 17 July 1948.
22. Cab 124/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 24 June 1948.

On 9 July 1948, Barry sent a memorandum to the Festival Council stating that after careful consideration and an exhaustive search, the Executive Committee could now recommend to the Festival Council whose endorsement they were seeking, that the Combined Exhibition, which would occupy a total area of 550,000 square feet, be situated at Battersea Park. Battersea Park was chosen, he said, after a variety of sites had been examined, because of its attractive setting with its continuous frontage along the River Thames. Explaining how the exhibition would be housed, he said:

> Having regard to the known shortages of material and labour, and the fact that the Government intimated that no special buildings would be possible for 1951, they think it right to recommend a less ambitious alternative. Accordingly, the recommendation is that 40 per cent of the buildings for the combined exhibition and the science exhibition together shall be designed for the purpose; and that 60 per cent shall be composed of "standard structure" of various types suitable for re-use. Of this 60 per cent, it is recommended that a proportion (yet to be specified) should consist of types specifically designed for the Festival but also having re-use value.[23]

Before the Festival Council could either reject or endorse the recommendations of the Executive Committee, however, the Official Committee held a meeting on 13 July 1948 to discuss their attitude towards the Executive's proposals. In general, they were not necessarily against the Executive's plans: the proposals, Nicholson said, did not strictly run counter to the Minister's conditional agreement to celebrating the Centenary, as they would not "call for

23. Work 25/44, Festival Council Papers, 9 July 1948. The Science Exhibition was to be reduced in size and housed with the Combined Exhibition in Battersea Park. However, in order to make this story of the housing of all the Festival exhibitions clearer, I will discuss all the details of the Science Exhibition and the search for its site further on in this chapter.

permanent new building or make major demands upon manpower and material.[24] In further discussion it was quite correctly pointed out that the scheme being put forward was on a very much smaller scale than the International Exhibition which had initially been seriously considered.

An exhibition of this category would have required some 5 million square feet of exhibition space, with building, including some permanent structures, costing £21 million and the necessary traffic developments for the Osterley Park scheme, costing £50 million; the Executive's proposals, the members concluded, "were of an entirely different order".[25] Furthermore, there were no alternatives to housing the Combined Exhibition in Battersea Park; the avenues of using Earls Court and Olympia had been fully explored and had to be rejected. Thus the Official Committee endorsed the recommendation from the Executive Committee that the Combined Exhibition and the Science and Technology Exhibition should be situated in Battersea Park.

The Official Committee's reasonableness was, unfortunately, not infectious. On 12 July 1948, a day before the meeting of the Official Committee, the IPC, to whom the Official Committee sent a report on the resources the Festival Organisation would need for their consideration, met and gave their opinion on the proposals. Under the chairmanship of W. Strath of the Central Economic Planning Staff of the Treasury, the representatives of the Board of Trade, the

24. In March 1947, at a meeting of the Lord President's Committee, this was the condition which the Ministers made before agreeing to the celebration of the Centenary.
25. Cab 123/1335, Official Committee Minutes, 13 July 1948.

Ministries of Supply and Works and the Treasury, denounced and rejected the Executive Committee's proposals.[26] They did so on the grounds that the Lord President, in his statement of 5 December 1947 to the House of Commons, had clearly stated, "it is now clear that under the revised investment programme no new construction for such purposes (celebrating the Centenary of 1851) can be undertaken for 1951". It was their belief that the country's economic and investment prospects had not improved and it was difficult to see how any resources could be made available for construction of this kind, regardless of whether the structures for 1951 were of a temporary, semi-permanent or permanent nature.[27] They proposed to report to the Government that in view of the shortage of steel and of labour in the London area for essential building programmes, they recommended that no materials or labour should be spared for temporary structures of any kind for the Festival exhibitions.[28]

The attitude of the IPC was reported to the Official Committee members by Nicholson at a meeting on the following day, 13 July. The Committee decided that in view of this attitude, which as was shown earlier was diametrically opposed to their own, a report showing exactly what the Festival Organisation was asking for in terms of labour and materials for their temporary buildings should be written by them and presented to the Lord President for his consideration. On 17 July 1948, Nicholson presented this report to the Lord President. In it he set down clearly how the Executive

26. The members of this Committee (the IPC) who were looking at the Executive's proposals from an investment angle are listed in Annex 2.
27. Cab 124/1335, IPC Minutes, 12 July 1948.
28. Ibid. Official Committee Minutes, 13 July 1948.

Committee had reached the decision that it would be necessary to house both the Combined and the Science and Technology Exhibitions in temporary buildings on an open site. The Official Committee, he said, endorsed the Executive Committee's view that Battersea Park would make the best site for their major exhibitions. Knowing how sensitive the Government was to the idea of using parklands for Festival purposes, Nicholson drew the Lord President's attention to the fact that the public had been denied access to the park for the last seven years due to military allotments and occupation. In the Official Committee's view, another three or four years of partial closure would not make such a great difference. The report then proceeded to outline the plan the Executive had adopted for housing the exhibition - sixty per cent standard shedding, forty per cent specially designed structures. Speaking on behalf of the Official Committee, Nicholson said:

> we consider, if these exhibitions are to be staged on an open site and they are to be worthily housed, that this scheme is as reasonable and economical as could be hoped for and, in our view, it is unlikely that any acceptable economies could be made in it which would materially effect the problem of finding resources. We understand that the Investment Programmes Committee see great difficulty in finding the steel and building labour which would be required mainly in 1950.

The Committee concluded this aspect of their report by stating:

> if a special British Industries Fair (and other industrial exhibitions which will contribute to export) are to be held in 1951, they will effectively shut out from Earls Court and Olympia the major exhibitions to be staged by the Festival of Britain and therefore if both the BIF and Trade Exhibitions and the Festival of Britain are to take place, there is no real alternative to housing the main Festival Exhibitions in temporary buildings in a public open space, as proposed by the Festival Organisation. It is clearly for

> Ministers to decide whether such a scheme can be accepted.[29]

After despatching the Official Committee's report to the Lord President, Nicholson turned his attention to convincing the IPC of the rightness and necessity of the Executive Committee's plans. He was not altogether convinced or, for that matter, impressed by the logic of the IPC's arguments, as he pointed out to Sir Edwin Plowden, Chairman of the Committee, in a memorandum on 21 July 1948:

> the present Chancellor (Sir Stafford Cripps, who took over from Hugh Dalton from 13 November 1947) who originally propounded this idea when he was President of the Board of Trade. When the thing was put into my hands, I made every effort to reach a compromise which would have meant either holding the BIF very early in the year, or staggering it in one building, but although the Board of Trade for some time thought this would be workable, when it came to getting out the detailed scheme and consulting their Advisory Council they had to reject it. Apart from the concert hall, the claims on materials are for a Combined Exhibition and for Exhibitions of Science and Technology, Architecture, Town Planning and Building research.[30]

29. Cab 124/1335, Report by the Official Committee, 17 July 1948. See Annex 2A.
30. Ibid. Nicholson to Plowden, 21 July 1948. The Concert Hall scheme mentioned refers to the plans that were being discussed at this time and endorsed by the Executive that a Concert Hall should be built for the Festival events in 1951, either on the South Bank as part of its redevelopment programme or on the Queens Hall Site. These will be discussed further on in this chapter as they bear direct relevance to how this whole matter of housing the Festival exhibitions was resolved.
The Architecture Exhibition; by 21 July 1948 the Architecture Council had finally managed to organise some plans of what this exhibition would entail. At a meeting of the Festival Council on 21 July 1948, the Director General of the Executive presented a memo which stated that the Architectural Council now wished to present an exhibition that would entail developing a "site of a suitable size adjoining the main exhibition area as a cross-section of a residential neighbourhood containing houses, flats, shops, nursery schools, open spaces etc., the whole area complete with roads, landscaping and services being handed back to the local authority for normal occupation at the end of the exhibition.

The IPC, he said, "appears to be unable to point out any specific repercussions on other really vital national interests which would result from acceptance of this scheme". He continued by adding that the Festival's exhibitions, far from being frivolous and inessential, would have an immense indirect effect in putting over a wide range of British exports, in which design, technology and living conditions are involved. Furthermore he said that the Festival would also be able to stimulate the much needed modernisation of design, technology and other processes that would be vital to the future of British industry if it was to retain any kind of competitive edge in the world markets. The Festival, like the BIF, he argued, would be able to produce a substantial flow of hard currency into the country as a result of the large number of foreign visitors expected to come to Britain for the Festival. Nicholson was convinced that the Festival would provide the British people with a morale booster which he thought might be badly needed when Marshall Aid came to an end. He reminded Sir Edwin that "it was the Ministers who had agreed without asking any questions to a big national festival and what it was to cover". The Government was, he emphasized, heavily committed to the Festival, having not only announced that it was to take place, but also having gone as far as setting up a Festival Organisation.[31]

While waiting for a reply from Sir Edwin, Nicholson turned his attention back to the Lord President who, he was quick to realise, was in a difficult position. As the Minister in charge of the Festival he was responsible for its eventual success or failure. But

31. Ibid.

its potential success depended not on the Executive Committee's plans, but on Morrison's ability to get other ministers enthusiastic about the Festival. This was vital, for without a great degree of commitment from them the Festival could not get off the ground. In this task of raising Ministers' consciousness it was Nicholson's job to provide Morrison with all the convincing arguments that would sway them. Nicholson told Morrison to explain to the President of the Board of Trade, Harold Wilson (who took over from Sir Stafford Cripps from 29 September 1947), that:

> It (i.e. the Festival) will put the spotlight on British science, technology and design etc. in a way which will be worth, in some ways more than the BIF at a time when the seller's market is probably over and it will incidentally bring in enough extra hard currency and tourists to earn its keep. Also the stimulus to productivity and more intelligent use of materials through better design and improved practice will give a big economic dividend which the President should support. No-one is complaining that the BIF now wants to absorb all existing exhibition buildings for 1951, but if the President takes this line, it is up to him to support an alternative which will enable the decision to hold a worthwhile 1951 Festival to be carried out.[32]

These points should, Nicholson said, impress the President and, more importantly, they were issues that he should find sound enough to support. Nicholson instructed Morrison to tell the Minister of Works that:

> while it was hoped that existing buildings could be used, the claims of the BIF make this impossible and the only Ministerial decision was that there should be no permanent buildings or major claims on resources. The previous Osterley Park International Exhibition scheme involved over five times the exhibition area (5 million square feet) and well over ten times the expenditure. As the Government has decided that a worthwhile exhibition is to be put on and as the Board of Trade needs the existing exhibition buildings, the Government is morally committed to something of this

32. Cab 124/1335, Nicholson to Morrison, 21 July 1948.

> order and could not draw back without far stronger grounds of repercussions on other important national interests than have been suggested.

The Minister of Works was, Nicholson wrote, to stress this last point to his officials and not allow them to take too rigid a line. Lastly, Nicholson instructed Morrison to tell the Economic Secretary of the Treasury that:

> while the gross cost in material of the exhibition and the concert hall schemes taken together may come up to some 9,000 tons, the net cost should not exceed about 4,000 and, if the LCC use their ingenuity in fitting in labour, the effect of putting back other construction in the London area should not be great, particularly as the main load on labour does not occur until 1950 when the housing position should be less difficult.[33]

Nicholson had already started to devise an alternative scheme should the Lord President find it impossible to get support from these Ministers: this new plan allowed for the Combined Exhibition to be held in Battersea Park, but limited it to a smaller scale than the Executive Committee had originally envisaged. The space for the temporary structures would be reduced from the original 900,000 to 750,000 square feet. The costs would be lowered and the structures would only occupy the existing open areas in the northern half of the park. Thus, the park would not have to be closed because the entire southern half of the park would be left open and free for continuous public use.[34]

The revised plan was sent to Morrison, although Nicholson warned him that it was:

> still open to objections from the investment resources angle, but it would be considerably more economical and to that extent less unpalatable than the original scheme.

33. Ibid.
34. Ibid. Nicholson to Morrison, 22 July 1948.

Sir Edwin Plowden was, Nicholson said, in favour of this revised scheme, but felt it his duty to point out to Nicholson that some parts of the Treasury and the IPC still did not agree with the investing of scarce resources even on a scaled-down Battersea Park project. Nicholson asked Morrison to put the revised scheme to the Ministers, finding out their views before be made a decision. Nicholson told Morrison that he hoped:

> that the Ministers will give a clear indication whether or not they are prepared to recommend to the Cabinet use of resources on this scale for 1951 and if not, how else they think that a worthwhile show could be organised.[35]

However, despite all of Nicholson's and Morrison's manoeuverings behind the scenes, the Executive Committee's plans to use Battersea Park received yet another unexpected setback. On 21 July 1948, the Festival Council met to discuss the Executive's recommendations which had been presented to them on 9 July. Several Council members were of the opinion that there would be strong public opposition to the use of Battersea Park and of the diversion of funds and building labour into the exhibitions which could be used for other more essential purposes, such as the reconstruction of houses and schools. Moreover, the Council members were also concerned that the Festival Organisation should avoid taking any action that might arouse public hostility and opposition to the Festival projects as a whole. The Council members felt that the Festival exhibitions should be housed in existing buildings or permanent buildings which had already been planned for completion by 1951. If the Executive still insisted on using an open site, the

35. Ibid.

Council suggested that inquiries should be made into the possibility of adapting the South Bank redevelopment plan, so as to accommodate the exhibitions there. Perhaps, they said, it would be possible to arrest the building of the proposed Government offices on the site so that the exhibitions could be housed in the shell, with the building being completed at the end of the exhibition.[36] Thus, contrary to all expectations, the Council, while taking seriously its honorary and advisory role, had decided it would seem not to appear as an automatic rubber stamp for the Executive's schemes. This attitude and their views were communicated to the Lord President on 22 July 1948, in a letter from Leonard Elmhirst, a member of the Council, which stated, "The Council of your '51 Exhibition came to life yesterday and promptly jammed a spanner in the works of the Executive Committee". The reason for this was that they could not see:

> how in a world of drastic economy they are going to justify to their various constituencies any expenditure at all on a Festival, whether of money, labour or materials, at a time when so many young married couples are living with their in-laws and when industry is short of steel. They feel they must have an imperative reason that they can place before the public in this country and the world at large.

Naturally, in view of this attitude, the Council considered the Executive Committee's proposals indefensible and further, they were worried that the use of Battersea Park would mean depriving a large section of the south London population of the use of the park for two years, "with no guarantee that the park would recover its present beauty and charm for some time to come". Elmhirst said that there was also a natural scepticism amongst the Council about the

36. Work 25/7, Festival Council Minutes, 21 July 1948.

chances of recouping even a proportion of the £2.5 million suggested for outlay, or of salvaging very much of the expenditure on labour and materials for the buildings. Finally the Council were doubtful as to what would be shown in the proposed buildings and also that any exhibition which required a greater walking distance than was available to the public at the Victoria and Albert Museum for the "Britain Can Make It" Exhibition, was probably unwise.[37]

This last objection of the Council's, as to what would fill the buildings, was indeed ironic for it was obvious they lacked the creative imagination of the Executive Committee. Moreover, when the combined Exhibition was finally opened to the public on the South Bank, there were 22 pavilions which housed over 10,000 exhibits. In view of their objections, however, the Council members wished, Elmhirst said:

> to explore the possibility of using the opportunity offered by the Exhibition to make both a temporary and permanent contribution to the rehabilitation of the South Bank of the river. Some people felt that the opportunity for holding the World's Fair in New York was used, not to destroy temporarily an existing park amenity but to turn an old dump into a permanent asset to the city and to provide on it some permanent buildings of use to the Exhibition and to the public afterwards. You, as an old Chairman of the LCC, will realise how strongly this idea of using the 1951 occasion to convert the semi-demolished slums into a permanent public asset would appeal not only to Londoners and English people generally but to the whole world, that wonders whether or not we are going to lose or use an opportunity we have not had since the great fire of London in the 17th Century.

Elmhirst concluded his letter by saying that:

> if it were possible to add to the site shown to us, of the LCC proposals, which was limited by the map, I have a feeling that there would be very little difficulty in selling to the Council the idea of combining Council plans with LCC improvement. Whatever was shown in the exhibition

37. Cab 124/1336, Elmhirst to Morrison, 22 July 1948.

> buildings, the idea of such combination is eminently saleable to the public both here and abroad.[38]

The Government had thus found a surprising ally in helping them arrive at their decision as to whether or not the Festival exhibitions should be housed in Battersea Park. On 24 July 1948, the Government gave the Festival Organisation its answer, which was delivered to them in a letter from Nicholson to Barry. They had decided not to permit the use of Battersea Park on the grounds that they:

> considered that the provision of temporary structures for housing the combined and science exhibitions in Battersea Park could not be justified in view of the continuing extreme shortage of steel and labour, and of the strong public objections which must be expected to the closing of most or all of the park.

The Government concluded that in view of their ban on the construction of temporary structures, the Executive Committee would be well advised to look at the museums and institutes in South Kensington to accommodate their exhibitions.[39]

38. Ibid.
39. Work 25/44, Report by Barry to the Festival Council, 27 July 1948.

RE-EXAMINING EXISTING STRUCTURES

On receiving the Government's answer, the Executive Committee made a preliminary examination of the Government's latest proposal and visited all the buildings in the area. They rapidly came to the conclusion that the five museums (the Victoria and Albert, the Natural History, the Science and Geology Museums, and the Imperial Institute, which combined gave a total floor area of approximately 804,000 square feet and a ground floor area of 448,000 square feet) were unsuited to their purpose. More importantly, the Directors of these museums were unanimous in the opinion that to clear the required space in order to mount the Festival's exhibitions for 1951, would have the most disruptive effect on their plans for post-war recovery and development.[40] They were very concerned that the burden and the magnitude of total clearance and subsequent storage of pieces, apart from being an absurd idea, would be a long and extremely costly task with its own peculiar and complex problems. They explained to the Executive that it would take four years, from November 1949 to October 1953 to dismantle, mount the 1951 exhibitions and to reinstate the museums. To move their exhibits to and from storage facilities would cost approximately

40. The holding of the Festival Exhibitions in museums would have caused a serious interruption in a number of building programmes including: The Science Museum was due to start construction of a central block in 1950; the construction of a boilerhouse for all museums; the completion of the Entomological Block in the Natural History museum was due to begin in 1949/50; and the new herbarium at the Natural History museum was due to begin in 1951. In addition to this, there were also other minor works to be attended to. Cab 124/1295, Lidderdale to Nicholson, 27 July 1948.

£2,428,000 in London, where storage space was quite readily available, and in the regional areas it would cost approximately £2,991,000, as storage space was scarcer. Alternatively, they said that they could perhaps meet the Festival Organisation's needs half way by partially clearing their houses: thus the Victoria and Albert, Natural History, Geological and Science Museums and the Imperial Institute combined,could offer the Festival Organisation 95,000 square feet, at a cost (in terms of clearance and storage) of £50,000 in London and of £62,000 in the regional areas.[41]

On 27 July 1948, the Executive Committee presented their preliminary findings on the museums to the Festival Council. This report concluded that from an architectural point of view, these buildings were not suited to modern display techniques. It would, they said, be virtually impossible to set up a thematic exhibition in any of them and they had, after all, discarded the idea of mounting separate disconnected exhibitions. Furthermore, these

41. Work 25/44, Memo by Executive Council to Festival Council, 18 September 1948. The Directors of the Victoria & Albert, Science, and Geological Museums were asked to a meeting in the rooms of Sir John Maud at the Ministry of Education on 27 July 1948. Also present at the meeting were officials from the Ministry of Works, including Mr. Proctor, and the Ministry of Education, as well as Miss Lidderdale of the Official Committee. At the meeting it was decided that the Ministry of Works should collect information from the Directors of the Museums concerned as well as from the Imperial Institute which would explain the implications of using these structures for the Festival in terms of cost, interruption to research and building programmes and the like. The Directors would have to work out both the cost of total and partial clearance of their museum for the Festival exhibitions. The Directors report was to be pushed through with utmost speed and presented before the end of August to the Lord President. The Executive Committee, as can be seen from the note, received this detailed information in September. Cab 124/1295, Lidderdale to Nicholson, 27 July 1948.

buildings between them, provided recreation and education for approximately 2,890,000 people in the course of a year. It seemed ludicrous, as well as undesirable, that in a year when Britain was to be on show that these amenities with their highly historical and artistic exhibits were to be made inaccessible. To do this, they argued, would surely cause a public outcry far greater than any protest over the closing of a park. It was highly dubious, they thought, to provide one new show by taking away four good ones. Entering into the spirit of enterprise and initiative and taking their task very seriously, the Executive concluded that a "make-shift show housed in unsuitable, obsolete or dull surroundings may make a poor and even depressing effect upon the visitor":

> It may give him quite an inadequate idea of our progress and our inventiveness, and send him away with an impression the opposite of that intended to convey - namely, of the virility and the resilience of the nation, its powers of recovery and its place in the vanguard of progress. This would create hidden liabilities. Better no exhibition at all than one unworthy of an event which by 1951 will have been advertised across the world for three years.[42]

On 28 July 1948, the Festival Council met to discuss the Executive's report. They fully concurred with the views expressed and decided to inform the Government that the Combined Science and Technology Exhibitions should not be accommodated in the South Kensington Museums. Rather, these museums should be encouraged to complete their own reconstruction and development programmes in time for 1951, when they could present exhibitions of their own which would be worthy of the occasion.[43]

42. Work 25/44, Report by the Director General to the Festival Council, 27 July 1948.
43. Ibid. Festival Council Minutes, 28 July 1948.

The Festival Organisation was not going to be diverted from its mission of giving the world and the British people a brilliant show, nor was the Government, it appeared, prepared to abandon its pragmatic course. Both parties stood poised with neither side willing to compromise or retreat. Some kind of solution to this impasse had to be found. The London County Council, the Lord President's former office intervened presenting an answer, indeed making an offer that neither party could legitimately refuse.

THE SOUTH BANK SITE

As early as 20 May 1948, the Executive Committee were pressing the Official Committee to endorse the building of a permanent or temporary concert hall in London in time for 1951. The Arts Council was extremely anxious because the Albert Hall was the only concert hall in London, and they were firmly convinced that the cultural aspects of the Festival of Britain could not be worthily celebrated in 1951 without the provision of a new concert hall, be it temporary or permanent. They asked the Executive to support this view and present it to the Official Committee and, on 25 May 1948, the Official Committee discussed the Executive's latest recommendation. The Committee recognised the need for a new concert hall in London and agreed, in the course of discussion of possible sites which included the Queen's Hall site and Regent's Park, that the most likely setting for the new hall would be on the South Bank site which was due for redevelopment although, in the immediate climate, any commencement seemed remote. The Committee concluded by agreeing that every effort should be made to provide London with another concert hall by 1951, which they thought would probably have to be a temporary one, as it seemed unlikely that a permanent one could be built in time; the most suitable site for it would be on the South Bank.[44] On 2 June 1948, the Executive received word from the Official Committee that they endorsed the Executive's view that London needed another concert hall and they were now inviting the Executive to sponsor the building of a temporary concert hall in

44. Cab 124/1335, Official Committee Minutes, 25 May 1948.

London by 1951 as part of their programme of temporary construction for the Festival exhibitions.

Thus, the Executive Committee were now responsible not only for the Festival Exhibitions, but also for the construction of a concert hall. As the sponsors of this major venture, they were approached on 22 June 1948 by the LCC, the owners of the South Bank site. Howard Roberts, Clerk to the LCC came to talk to the Executive Committee members about the possibility of using the site in 1951. He explained to them that the LCC were planning to redevelop the South Bank between County Hall and Waterloo Bridge and this would, he said, form the first phase of their reconstruction scheme in that area. It had been decided to build new Government Offices and a cultural centre on the South Bank which would be financed and owned by them. The cultural centre would consist of two concert halls (one large, the other small), a restaurant, and a national theatre, the construction of which would not begin before 1952 but until then, however, the LCC were going to beautify the site by laying it out as a garden which would be ready for 1951. The LCC, Roberts said, were of the opinion that in view of the Government's decision to mark the Centenary of 1851, they wanted to bring forward their redevelopment plans for the South Bank and in particular, they wanted to have part of the cultural centre ready for 1951. They were convinced, Roberts said, that if they were given priority for labour and materials they could complete the larger concert hall in

time for 1951.[45] The completion of at least one of the concert halls was considered very important by both the Executive Committee and the Arts Council, who felt that the proposed cultural Festival could not be worthily celebrated without a new concert hall. The LCC for their part, were anxious to see the concert hall built on the South Bank because it would help to transform this area, which had no previously-known associations with music and the performing arts. This would be the beginning of a new cultural centre. Tempering the Executive Committee's enthusiasm, Nicholson, who was present at the meeting at which this whole subject was discussed, reminded the Executive that the issue was not so much whether the South Bank concert hall or the Queen's Hall concert hall should be built, but which one (if any) should be given priority for materials and labour, should these be available. He was inclined to think that if the LCC could build the embankment between County Hall and Waterloo Bridge, as well as erect a permanent concert hall in time for 1951, their scheme might well appear more attractive than the Queen's Hall scheme. But, he said, the issue was one for the Minister to decide, with full knowledge of the implications of each proposed scheme in terms of material and labour. He added that they had, however, already decided that the redevelopment scheme for the County Hall to Waterloo Bridge section of the South Bank should

45. Cab 124/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 22 June 1948. Also discussed at this meeting was the plan to build a new concert hall on the site of the old Queen's Hall and the St. George's Hall sites. This proposal came from Messrs. Chappell. Their hall would seat 4,000 and be financed entirely by them. The musical world as well as the Arts Council were strongly in favour of this scheme as the area (unlike the South Bank) was not only more accessible but had a long and well-known association with music.

proceed and, if further resources were available, one concert hall scheme would be chosen to go ahead. Seeing that the final decision would rest not with them but with the Government, the Executive decided to present an objective statement outlining the amount of labour and materials that both schemes would require.[46]

The IPC met on 12 July 1948, when they discussed not only the Executive's Battersea Park proposals, as mentioned earlier, but also the proposed concert hall schemes. They decided that the South Bank was much too elaborate to be practical for 1951, but agreed that if further examination of the Queen's Hall scheme established that the new concert hall could be completed there by 1951, the proposal would be accepted and they would make a recommendation that the necessary resources should be made available.[47] As far as the Festival Organisation was concerned, the ideal solution to the concert hall was, as Nicholson pointed out in the Official Committee's report to the Lord President, that both schemes should be implemented. The Official Committee, he said, strongly recommended that one of the schemes should go forward, but felt that they were not in a position to recommend one scheme above the other.[48]

The earliest indication that the Festival Organisation recognised the potential of the South Bank site came at a meeting of the Festival Council on 21 July 1948, where Council members expressed doubts as to the wisdom of using Battersea Park for the

46. Ibid. see Annexes 2B and 2C for the breakdown of resources needed for the construction of the South Bank and the Queen's Hall concert hall schemes.
47. Cab 124/1334, IPC Minutes, 12 July 1948.
48. Ibid. Report of the Official Committee, 17 July 1948.

Combined and Science and Technology Exhibitions and asked the Executive to look into the possibility of adapting the South Bank redevelopment scheme proposed by the LCC, so that the exhibitions could be housed on this site. They concluded by agreeing amongst themselves that the Executive should make a serious attempt to secure a modification of the LCC's redevelopment plans that would facilitate the inclusion of the Combined and Science and Technology Exhibitions on the South Bank site.[49]

By the 24 July 1948, when the Government rejected the Executive's Battersea Park proposals, the Executive left with no suitable place to house their exhibitions, began to seriously consider the merit in the Council's proposal. On 27 July, Barry sent a memorandum to the Festival Council, informing them that the Government had decided to give priority to the LCC's concert hall and to permit the redevelopment of the South Bank "so far as resources allow."[50] A jubilant Executive chose to interpret the Government's decision as the permission they needed to begin work on the South Bank, even though the decision referred specifically to the LCC's plans, not to the Executive's. In spite of this small technicality, the Executive not only began to develop blueprints for housing the exhibitions in tented structures on this site, because of the lack of materials, but they also asked the LCC to inform them how much clearance and development the South Bank scheme would entail. The LCC answered the Executive's request with their

49. Refer to p. 97 for the Festival Council's attitude towards using the South Bank for the Exhibitions.
50. Work 25/44, Report by the Executive Committee on the South Bank site, 27 July 1948.

characteristic energy and optimism because, after all, if the exhibition was situated on the South Bank it could only further enhance the area's reputation culturally. They said that the site, which comprised of the "wedge bounded by County Hall, the River, Waterloo Bridge and York Road", could be completely cleared of all existing tenancies and buildings, which as landlords the LCC owned; the area could be levelled by June 1949. The clearance, they explained, would include the filling in of basements, leaving a level surface, with the exception of the area on which the concert hall was to be built which would be excavated to basement level by June 1949.[51]

On 28 July 1948, the Council met to discuss the Executive's report on the South Bank site. The report served to confirm their belief that the South Bank was eminently suitable for the Festival exhibitions. The Executive was invited to examine the most appropriate ways in which this area could be used as a Festival centre for either the combined and science exhibitions or for any other exhibitions that were being contemplated.[52]

The Government had, however, yet to make a decision on the Festival Organisation's use of the South Bank and by August 1948, the Lord President was writing to the Ministers whose departments were closely concerned with the Festival about the Executive's latest plans. On 21 August 1948, he wrote to Aneurin Bevan, the Minister of Health, to say that the Executive had worked out a scheme

51. Ibid. From July to October 1948, the Executive developed the idea of using tentage as an answer to the Government's ban on the construction of temporary structures because of the shortage of materials. See Annex 2D.
52. Work 25/44, Festival Council Minutes, 28 July 1948.

which would make provision for a Combined Exhibition in attractive and gaily-coloured tented structures of sufficient durability, occupying 350,000 square feet to be situated on the South Bank site. Morrison concluded by stating that he believed this new scheme had considerable attractions and was, for the most part, free from the objections raised by the Battersea Park scheme.[53]

Having examined all other plausible alternatives, on 2 September 1948 the Executive formally agreed to use the South Bank as the site for both the Combined and the Science and Technology Exhibitions, to be housed in tented structures. They were supported in their view by the Council who passed the same resolution at a meeting on 23 September 1948. However, their problems with this site were not yet at an end: Government offices, financed and owned by the Ministry of Works, were to be constructed on an integral part of the site which the Festival Office needed, for without it, the site would be insufficient for their purposes. The Festival Organisation decided to press the Ministry of Works to make their portion of the site available for the exhibitions, and to give an undertaking not to begin any work on the site before or during 1951, which would compromise its use for Festival purposes. In addition, they asked that the Ministry to re-examine their estimates for

53. Cab 124/1336, Morrison to Bevan, 21 August 1948.

preparing and clearing their part of the site.[54] On 17 September, the Executive Committee learned, in a letter from Miss Lidderdale, that the Ministry of Works would not be able to make available the Riverside portion of the site on which the Government Offices were to be placed, for the use of the Festival exhibitions. The South Bank site, the Executive persisted, would be insufficient without the use of this area and therefore they decided that the only course of action open to them was to put the whole matter before the Lord President for him to resolve.[55] On 9 October 1948, the Executive Committee received the Government's answers, not only in terms of their use of the South Bank, but also regarding the Ministry of Works claim on the site. The Government agreed to the use of the site for the 1951 exhibitions and stated that a compromise had been reached with the Ministry of Works, who would be allowed to sink steel piling around the perimeter of the site, "as a token of their claims" to the area. In return, the Ministry had agreed to have the site ready for the Festival Organisation's use by the middle of 1950.[56]

54. Work 25/44, Festival Council Minutes, 28 July 1948. The Ministry of Works had reported to the Executive that their portion of the South Bank site would only be advanced as far as foundation level by the summer of 1951 (this was based on the assumption that the site would have been cleared by June 1949). Furthermore, the Ministry said that although no work for the Government buildings would have begun by 1951, there was a great possibility that work might begin that year. Thus the Festival skyline, instead of being alive and gay with British architectural ingenuity and wonders, would it appeared, be nothing more than a mass of cranes, girders and scaffolding. Work 25/44, Report by the Executive of the South Bank, 27 July 1948.
55. Work 25/7.
56. Cab 124/1336, Executive Committee Minutes, 12 October 1948.

Thus, it would seem that with the acquisition of a site the Festival was beginning to take shape and the planning and development could, from now on, assume some semblance of reality. The Executive Committee, guided by Nicholson and aided by the LCC, had won the first round of their fight to have a show worthy of their vision of the nation.

The Festival project was saved not by Government commitment, but by the timely intervention of the LCC whose desire to contribute to the Festival was motivated for their part by unabashed self-interest. It was to their benefit, in the dawning era of the growing responsibility of Local Government and the development schemes for the betterment of their communities to be seen to be actively doing something for Londoners, especially Morrison's beloved South Londoners who would after all benefit directly from the beautification of their once ugly surroundings. A location had been found for the Combined Exhibition but, as had been shown, however, the Executive had decided to hold separate exhibitions of science and architecture which still required suitable locations. In addition to this, the adoption of the idea of decentralization meant that carriers had to be found for the travelling exhibition. Above all, the Executive continued with their idea of staging a funfair as part of the Festival events, and this also needed a site.

THE HOUSING OF THE THE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY EXHIBITION

From 20 May 1948, the Executive Committee decided that there would be a Combined Exhibition and separate exhibitions of Science and Technology and Architecture. It had at first been thought that the Combined Exhibition and the Science and Technology Exhibition could be housed at Earls Court and if necessary Olympia. In this connection the Executive Council asked the Science Council to present estimates regarding the space their exhibition would require. The Science Council informed the Executive that their exhibition would need approximately 400-500,000 square feet, and further, because of the delicate nature of the models and exhibits, a permanent structure was essential. On the basis of this request, the Executive decided that the Science Exhibition should be housed in Earls Court. However, when the Executive examined the possibility of using Earls Court and Olympia, they encountered some difficulties, over conflicting dates with the Board of Trade, and reluctance on their part to relinquish either of the halls for these Exhibitions.[57]

While the Executive was convinced that the Combined Exhibition would be better suited to an open site, they felt that the claim should still be pressed for the Science Exhibition to be housed at Earls Court. To this end Max Nicholson (who thought that Earls Court and Olympia should be put at the disposal of the Festival Organisation for their major static exhibitions) with the permission of the Executive Committee, proposed to ask the Lord President to

57. See pp. 78-81.

write to the Minister of Works requesting that he notify all parties concerned that the Festival Organisation would in all probability be requiring these buildings in 1951, and that his co-operation in getting the private parties to postpone or cancel their projects would be greatly appreciated.[58]

However, even if all the private companies had agreed to postpone their engagements, the Board of Trade had yet to be asked if it would be willing to use only Olympia for its exhibition. The Board of Trade was asked to bring the BIF forward to the beginning of 1951 by the Official Committee, or to examine the possibility of confining the fair to either of the two buildings by staggering the BIF in sections over twice its normal period, in order to release both venues in time for the Festival exhibitions to open on 1 May 1951.[59] After considering these proposals, the Board of Trade informed the Official Committee that they could not comply with either request. They said that the BIF required approximately one month to mount and one week to dismantle their exhibition displays and, if the dates were staggered it would mean that there would be a gap of five weeks between the first and second BIF show; they further emphasised that as most buyers were interested in a range of exhibits, it would be virtually impossible to make two self-contained

58. Cab 124/1334, Official Committee Minutes, 11 March 1951.
59. Cab 124/1335, Memo by Lidderdale to Executive Committee, 25 June 1948.
Although the Executive had chosen Earls Court in preference to Olympia, both buildings offered the same amount of space and ultimately either one would have served their purposes adequately.

shows.[60] This was a disadvantage that was unacceptable especially as 1951 was likely to be a buyers market and, if a great number of buyers came to the BIF, export levels would probably be increased - a vital necessity to financially-troubled Britain. They insisted on retaining the use of both buildings, arguing that no other suitable sites were available and stressing that any attempts either to confine the exhibition to one hall, thereby reducing its total size, or to stagger the dates would be strongly resisted not only by themselves but by industry as a whole.[61] As the Government had initially urged, the Board of Trade intended to host an expanded BIF in 1951 lasting a period of three weeks instead of the usual annual fortnight.[62]

Not wishing to appear intransigent, however, the Board of Trade proposed a compromise: they were prepared to consider putting forward the opening date of the Earls Court section of the BIF to 1 April 1951, thus enabling the hall to be cleared and available for possession by the Festival authorities on 30 April 1951. They proposed to take possession of Earls Court on 1 March 1951 but to make the hall available to the Festival authorities three months prior to this date to begin preliminary work on the Science exhibition. They added, however, that all work done by the Festival

60. In 1951 there were 1700 exhibitors at Earls Court and Olympia and there were also further sections of the BIF held at Castle Bromwich in Birmingham. For further information on the BIF see Annex 2E.
61. Cab 124/1335, Memo by Lidderdale to the Executive Committee, 25 June 1948.
62. Although the Board of Trade intended to extend the BIF from two to three weeks in 1951 this did not happen and I have been unable to find any information regarding this change of mind.

authorities in this period would have to be restricted to the roof and wall area, thereby not impinging in any substantial extent on the floor area. With great reluctance, they were further prepared to reduce their total floor area by some 10 per cent, to allow a certain amount of constructional work by the Festival authorities.The Festival Organisation would have a further two months after the BIF ended in which to install the science exhibits and open on 1 July 1951.[63]

These options were presented to the Executive who considered them at a meeting on 29 June 1948. Ian Cox, the Director of Science said that although he had only had time to consult one member of the Science Council, and as such the new proposal had not gone before the whole Council, it was his belief that the Council members would find the proposal objectionable, especially because the Science Exhibition would have to open later than the other Festival exhibitions, that is 1 July 1951 instead of 1 May. He said that "science offered one of the most spectacular and important parts of the Festival exhibitions and as the Festival was bound to be judged on its first few weeks of life, the absence of this part at that stage would be disastrous". Whatever was given as the official explanation of this, the public would, he said, be inclined to judge this later opening as a result of inefficiency. To solve the whole problem, he proposed that the Science exhibition should be housed in a specially constructed building, with re-use value, thereby enabling it to open on time with the other exhibitions. Barry concurred with

63. Cab 124/1335, Memo by Lidderdale to the Executive Committee, 25 June 1948.

with Ian Cox's view that the Science Exhibition was likely to be one of the most important and exciting "stories" of the Festival and therefore, its opening date could not be postponed nor its period of show curtailed. Furthermore he said, "was it not altogether too optimistic to assume that installation could be accomplished when the COI had hitherto reckoned that four months was the minimum time required .... would it not be wiser to discard the purely notional figure of 500,000 square feet, which had been given by the Science Council for planning purposes, reduce it to 250,000 square feet, and include this size in the Combined Exhibition at Battersea Park with the Architecture Exhibition being housed elsewhere".[64] The Executive agreed with Barry's view and decided to reject the Board of Trade's offer, preferring to house the Science Exhibition with the Combined Exhibition in temporary structures in Battersea Park.[65]

The Executive's decisions were warmly accepted when presented to the Council of Science and Technology who affirmed that:

> in a display of the British contribution to civilization, science had at least as much to offer as any other field of activity - possibly more than any other. It was essential, therefore, that the exhibition of science should open at the same time as the main Festival begins (1 May). The Festival would be judged, both by the press and the overseas and home public, on its first few weeks and it was unthinkable that our scientific contributions should not be put on show at this time. Further, whatever information was put out, a late opening for the science exhibition would be construed as a result of muddle and inefficiency.

They concluded that if the exhibition could not open on 1 May, the offer of Earls Court had to be rejected and any new site to be

64. Cab 124/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 29 June 1948.
65. Ibid.

considered for the exhibition would have to be as close as possible to the main Festival exhibitions if not a part of them, as was being proposed.[66]

The Battersea Park proposal was shown earlier, was rejected by the Festival Council and more significantly by the Government. The latter was motivated by the desire to have the public enjoy unhindered use of the park; more pertinent to this decision, was the fact that the Government was acutely aware of the constraints imposed upon its ability to acquiesce to ideas that demanded large expenditure from scant resources.[67]

The Executive finding the museums and institutes of South Kensington unsuited to their required purpose abandoned this idea and turned its attention to the South Bank site as a suitable venue from which to mount the Combined and Science and Technology exhibitions. In September 1948, the Government had given the LCC permission to redevelop the site so far as the country's resources would allow, and the Council had recommended that the Executive should try to seek a modification of the LCC's plans so that the exhibitions could be housed on this site. They were successful in this quest for, as no other alternative housing for the exhibitions could be found, the Government had no other alternative but to allow the Festival Organisation to use the South Bank.[68]

66. Cab 124/1295, Report by the Director of Science to the Science and Technology Council, 8 October 1948.
67. See pp. 84-7 for a discussion of the Battersea Park proposals.
68. See pp. 106-9 for a discussion on the Festival Organisation's use of the South Bank site.

Having located a site for the Combined Exhibition, the themes that the Executive Committee had been discussing regarding the South Bank site were being developed in their minds. The site was small, only 28 acres, offering approximately 420,000 square feet of space - the initial estimates for the Science Exhibition alone were for an area of 400-500,000 square feet. As the plans for the Combined Exhibition developed, the Science Council felt that since in addition to science, other subject-matter was to be accommodated within the small area of the site, the display possibilities for the scientific contribution would become considerably lessened, and the exhibition would not be able to do justice to the Lord President's demand that it should demonstrate the extremely wide field of British scientific contribution.[69] The Council decided, therefore, that there was a need for additional space for the display of certain aspects and achievements which might otherwise impair the balance of the Combined Exhibition which was being envisaged. The Council passed a resolution to this effect which stated that:

> while the opportunity for displaying many of the achievements of British science in the Combined Exhibition is welcomed, an additional Science Exhibition is required for the display of those more fundamental aspects which might either spoil the balance of the Combined Exhibition, or be excluded on the grounds of space.[70]

Thus, on the basis of this resolution, a further re-examination began of all the available accommodation in central London that was

69. Cab 124/1295, Report of Director of Science to Science Council, 8 October 1948.
70. Ibid. Science Council Minutes, 13 October 1948.

either adjoining or accessible to the South Bank site. Investigations were again made into the practicability of museum space in the South Kensington area being allocated for Festival purposes. The Science Museum offered an area of 35,000 square feet on four floors of its western block which needed redecorating and reglazing. The Museum's Director was of the opinion, however, that the expenditure necessary to provide special temporary facilities in this block would be uneconomical and against the permanent interests of the Science Museum. The Geological Museum was prepared to offer 5,000 square feet for the mounting of a special exhibition which would illustrate the place of Britain in the development of geological science, but only on condition that it was run by the Museum's staff - a condition that the Festival Organisation would not have agreed to. The Director of the Geological Museum was, reluctant, however, even to offer this small amount of space because he felt that the use of the museum for Festival exhibitions would greatly interfere with its normal work. The Imperial Institute would only offer an area of 16,000 square feet on the condition that any display mounted had a Commonwealth theme.

It became apparent from these offers that the only suitable place to house the Science exhibition was the Science Museum which was duly inspected by Ian Cox, the Director of Science, and Cecil Cooke, the Director of Exhibitions. They found the Science Museum's offer to be satisfactory for the purpose of mounting the Science Exhibition, provided that certain modifications were made to the proposed exhibition space which would allow separate entry to the

1951 Science Exhibition from outside the building.[71]

The Science Council were, however, uncertain as to whether the space in the Science Museum should be accepted. On 9 October, Nicholson sent a memo to the Lord President stating that the Chairman of the Science Council, Sir Alan Barlow, and the Director of Science, Ian Cox, wanted his guidance on what he expected of the Science exhibition, as this had originally been his idea. Nicholson said:

> I have always understood that you wanted it to be a big and worthwhile show and the suggestion that it should be squeezed into 35,000 square feet or about a quarter the size of the "Britain Can Make It" and about one-twelfth the size of the Earls Court, does not look at all like meeting your views, if I have understood them rightly.
> No exhibition of much less than 400,000 square feet could possibly be looked on as a first-rate show or as giving room to accommodate the great variety of achievements of British science. To get anything like the area in South Kensington would absorb the whole of the Science and Geological Museums plus the Imperial Institute and a bit more in other buildings. It is very doubtful if this is practical even though the Exhibition would be presenting the same subjects which the Museums affected exist to display.

The alternatives to accepting the Science Museum's offer, Nicholson said, were either to house the Science Exhibition in tented structures in some suitable open site such as Battersea Park or Crystal Palace, or to place the Science exhibition in the exhibition halls at Wembley. However, before examining these alternatives, he said that the Science Council wished to know the type of exhibition the Lord President envisaged.[72]

71. Cab 124/1295, Report of the Director of Science to the Science Council, 8 October 1948.
72. Cab 124/1295, Memo by Nicholson to the Lord President, 9 October 1948.

On 10 October, the Lord President replied to Nicholson's questions stating that it was important to learn what the Science Council proposed to do with any space they did acquire. The 400,000 square feet which Nicholson mentioned as a worthy size for the Exhibition was, Morrison said, over three times the size of the "Britain Can Make It" exhibition which he felt was not only needless but he also asked whether the crowds would go to Crystal Palace. He suggested that the space offered by the Science Museum should be accepted.[73]

At a meeting of the Science Council on 13 October 1948, the Council members recommended the following: that the offer made by the Science Museum should be accepted; that the Science Exhibition should be distinct from the normal displays in the Science Museum; and that the exhibition should be arranged and managed by the Festival Organisation. On 7 December 1948, Ian Cox sent a memo to the Science Council which stated that the Science Museum were building a new "centre section" in the museum. The Lord President had written to the Minister of Works to ask if this construction, which was part of the priority programme recommended by the Standing Commissions on Museums and Galleries, could be started and available in some form to house the Science Exhibition in 1951. The response to this request was very positive. The Ministry of Works would try to complete the basement and ground floors of the new building and hand them over early in 1951; a temporary roof would be installed on

73. Ibid. Morrison's reply is written on this document and is dated 10 October 1948.

the central wall in order to provide a more adequate and worthy setting for the Exhibition of Science and Technology. This new "centre section" would provide approximately 100,000 square feet of covered space with considerably more impressive approaches (than the original area offered) and would also border the western block which the Science Council had already been offered and would still be using.[74]

In addition to the western block's 35,000 square feet which they had already accepted, the Science Council were pleased with this extension of space for their Science Exhibition; science would now not only be represented on the South Bank in the Combined Exhibition, but in addition it would have a combined area of 135,000 square feet of space in the Science Museum in which to outline and highlight the British Contribution to Civilization in Science and Technology in a display that the Director of Science promised "to be one of the most spectacular and important parts of the Festival exhibitions."[75]

74. Cab 124/1295, Memo by the Director of Science to the Science Council, 7 December 1948.
75. See p. 115 for Ian Cox's remarks on the Science Exhibition.

THE ARCHITECTURE TOWN PLANNING AND BUILDING RESEARCH CENTRE

In July 1948, the Architecture Council began the task of designing its exhibition by drawing up two possible types of display. Their initial idea was to house a conventional type of exhibition consisting of photographs, drawings, plans and elevations to be displayed on screens. This would not have done justice to the vitality and promise of post-war British architecture, however, and the Architecture Council therefore devised another plan which was presented to the Executive on 21 July 1948. This more ambitious scheme called for the development of a site of a suitable size adjoining the main exhibition area, to display the advances in architecture, town planning and building in a newly developed cross-section of a residential neighbourhood containing houses, flats, shops, nursery schools and open spaces: the whole area would be completed with roads, landscaping and services and would be handed back to the relevant local authority at the end of the exhibition, for normal occupation.[76] This plan was adopted by the Architecture council as a scheme which they felt would not only clearly display good architecture, but would also be a guaranteed success.[77] The Executive Committee agreed with this plan as did the Festival Council and the Government. The members of the Architecture Council then turned their attention to the finding of a suitable site. They examined sites in Clapham High Street, Hurlingham No. 2 Pologround, Roehampton, Woodberry Down

76. Work 25/44, Memo by the Director General to the Festival Council, 21 July 1948.
77. Work 25/45, Executive Committee Minutes, 20 July 1948.

Redevelopment Area in Stoke Newington, Battersea-Patmore Street area, Camberwell-Kingswood Drive, Westminster-Pimlico area, Grosvenor Road, and the Stepney-Ocean Street area. All of these sites were eventually rejected because there were doubts as to whether their respective layout were still in a fluid enough state to permit the amendments desired by the Architectural Council.[78]

Apart from these sites, two other areas were given serious consideration by the Architecture Council: the Poplar neighbourhood "Unit Nine", at the junction of East India Dock Road and Burdett Road suggested by the LCC; and Unit ten of the same neighbourhood from East India Dock Road to Brunswick Road, also suggested by the LCC and the Ministry of Town and Country Planning. Apart from the fact that it had very strong support from the LCC because, like the South Bank, it was in urgent need of reconstruction for which the LCC was responsible, the advantage of using the former site (Unit Nine) was that apart from it being the first area scheduled for comprehensive planning under the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act, it also provided sufficient amount of land which would afford a varied and interesting group of buildings, both residential and commercial; furthermore, the plans already drawn up for this site were fluid enough to be adjusted to the special requirements of the exhibition. The site offered the chance of associating the 'Live' Architecture Exhibition with the cause of construction, particularly in the badly-bombed areas. A feature that ought not to be overlooked.

78. Work 25/44, Report by the Director of Architecture on the site for the Live Architecture Exhibition, 7 September 1948.

The factors favouring the use of the second site, "Unit Ten" were that it was the area near the eastern end declaratory area that the LCC intended to develop first and, as such, ample land on the site had already been cleared and the LCC intended to complete any necessary demolitions within the first stage of development. Further, use of this site would have the advantage, like "Unit Nine", of forming part of a larger area to be developed in the near future and of having the full support of the LCC's Planning Department who were hoping to erect community buildings, health centres, churches, schools and flats.

These sites were exactly what the members of the Architectural Council were looking for and they recommended, without reserve, that the neighbourhood "Units Nine and Ten" be selected as the site for the 'Live' Architectural Exhibition.[79] On 18 September 1948, the Executive Committee endorsed the findings of the Architecture Council and recommended that the 'Live' Architecture Exhibition should be sited in the Stepney-Poplar area within the neighbourhood "Units Nine and Ten". On 5 October, the Executive was informed that the Festival Council approved the choice of site within this neighbourhood for the Architecture Exhibition.[80]

At a Festival Council meeting on 14 December 1948, however, the members had a further recommendation from the Architecture Council and the Executive which asked that the Council should endorse the use of only "Unit Nine" in the Stepney-Poplar area, which offered 124 acres, for the 'Live' Architecture Exhibition. They further asked

79. Ibid.
80. Work 25/44, Executive Committee Minutes, 18 September 1948.

asked that the LCC should be requested to make this unit available for the Architecture Exhibition.[81] The Council endorsed this new proposal and on 14 December 1948, Barry sent a letter to Howard Roberts, Clerk to the LCC, explaining what the 'Live' Architecture Exhibition would consist of a cross-section of residential neighbourhood buildings, partially completed buildings containing show flats or similar exhibition units which would demonstrate building techniques, as well as buildings actually in the course of erection, using modern methods of construction and building machinery. This full scale demonstration would therefore, he said, not only show the advantages of town planning but also the great advances which had been made in building science. He stated that he had been directed by the Festival Council to inform them that of the two sites they had suggested "Unit Nine" should be chosen as the most suitable area for the exhibition and a sizeable portion of the site needed to be made available as soon as possible for development of the 'Live' Architectural Exhibition. He concluded his letter by stating that no formal conditions were attached to this request, but it was being put forward on the understanding that there would be "full and effective consultation between the LCC and the Festival Organisation on the planning and on all visual aspects of the portion of the site which would be on display in 1951."[82]

81. Ibid. Memo by Secretary of Executive Committee to the Festival Council, 12 January 1949.
82. Work 25/44, Barry to Roberts, 14 December, 1948.

In reply to this request, Howard Roberts, Clerk to the LCC, said that provided all additional out-of-pocket expenditure incurred by the LCC by reason of the exhibition was reimbursed, the LCC would willingly co-operate with the Festival authorities in the arrangements for the exhibition.[83]

Thus, the 'Live' Architecture Exhibition had not only found a site, but because of its very nature, it would not, unlike the other proposed events for 1951, be any financial burden upon the Government, as the work for the exhibition was going to be performed by the LCC under their normal building programme. Under this agreement, the Festival authorities would co-operate with the LCC but retain the right to have the final word in matters of layout, design, types of construction, building techniques and choice of architect.[84]

83. Ibid. Roberts to Barry, 8 January 1948. It is interesting to note that the LCC made this condition in writing before consenting to the Festival Organisation's plans, thus making it impossible for the Organisation to claim, as it would do with the South Bank site, that the issue of out-of-pocket expenditure on the LCC's part was not mentioned when the LCC agreed initially to lend them the site; see p. 215.
84. Work 24/47, Official Committee Minutes, 13 January 1949.

THE PLEASURE GARDENS

The idea of a Festival Pleasure Garden was first initiated on 14 May 1948 by Cecil Cooke, the Director of Exhibitions, at one of the weekend conferences at Barry's home.[85] At the following meeting of the Executive, Barry raised Cooke's proposal and suggested that perhaps a funfair could be situated on the South Bank of the River Thames, below County Hall. This funfair, he further suggested, could be run independently of the Festival Organisation provided it conformed to the Festival's views on layout. The Executive accepted Barry's suggestion, but concentrated its energies on solving the more important problem of finding a site for the main Festival exhibitions, asking Miss Lidderdale of the Official Committee, who was present at the meeting to find out about the possibility of using this site for the funfair and Pleasure Gardens.[86] On 2 June 1948, she reported to the Executive that their idea for the funfair had been taken up by the Official Committee who had asked the Ministry of Works to examine the sites below Hungerford Bridge for the proposed funfair. The Ministry of Works, after their examination, said that the area below the Hungerford Bridge would be undergoing construction work which would have started by 1951. In response to this, the Executive asked Miss Lidderdale to submit, at the earliest possible opportunity, a report with a map showing the other areas on the South Bank that might be available for Festival purposes which at this early stage included

85. Cab 124/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 20 May 1948.
86. Cab 124/1252, Notes on the early development of the Festival Gardens project. 14 May 1948 - 25 November 1949.

the proposed funfair and concert hall.[87]

Miss Lidderdale's report on the site was presented to the Executive at a meeting on 22 June 1948. Her report was limited to the areas between County Hall and Southwark Bridge, (County Hall and Waterloo Bridge and the River Thames and Belvedere Road). The buildings around County Hall, Waterloo Bridge, the River Thames and Belvedere Road had either been totally destroyed or seriously damaged beyond repair by the bombing during the war. However, on some parts of the site, the damage to existing buildings was not as serious and repairs were still considered to be a feasible possibility. A funfair, the report suggested, might be situated on the western side of the site below Waterloo Bridge and with the damaged area on the other side of the upper ground, an area of nine acres could be provided.[88] As the ideas for the funfair rapidly developed, it seemed, however, that the nine acres provided by the South Bank would be insufficient. Furthermore, as they would find out on 29 June 1948 from Miss Lidderdale, the Ministry of Works did not consider that it would be practicable to put a funfair on their site of the river below County Hall. It would be expensive and uneconomical to clear the area and fill in existing basements to provide a temporary surface for the funfair, which would then have to be cleared away before they could begin constructing the foundations for their Government offices. Using this part of the site might cause delays which the Executive were unwilling to

87. Cab 124/1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 2 June 1948.
88. Ibid. Report by Miss Lidderdale to Executive Committee, 21 June 1948.

accept.[89] At this meeting, the Executive decided that a funfair of traditional type was not exactly what they had in mind, if anything the word funfair was misleading; rather they began to envisage a pleasure garden along the lines of the 'Tivoli' Gardens inCopenhagen. Set in the centre of Copenhagen, the Tivoli Gardens were considered at the time of the planning of the Festival of Britain, one of the finest amusement parks in the world. With an admission price of sixpence and an abundance of fine amusements, such as the usual funfair entertainments, restaurants, open-air cafes, the people of Denmark, from Royalty downwards enjoyed daily (until almost midnight) the amenities of this well laid out park. When he visited Denmark in 1950, Morrison was shown around the Park and was so excited by the Gardens that he declared: "Swaff tell Londoners they are too stuffy. They should have something like this in Hyde Park". What impressed Morrison most, the article in The People said, was the cheapness, of which he said: "Why, for a few shillings the workers can have a glorious time till nearly midnight. Your people have learned to enjoy themselves in the open. That's what London wants."[90] The LCC's Architecture Department, with their sights firmly fixed on 1951, suggested to the Executive Committee that they seek Government approval for a small permanent funfair to be planned along the lines of 'Tivoli' on the north-east corner of Hyde Park. Miss Lidderdale accepted that the members would not only be tempted by this new suggestion, but would actually want to investigate the possibility of using the area and

89. Ibid. Executive Committee Minutes, 29 June 1948.
90. The People, 20 August 1950.

she warned, therefore, that all proposals discussed and considered would of course be subject to Ministerial approval.[91] Not wishing to abandon the idea of an amusement park, the Executive Committee began to examine alternative sites. Any site subsequently chosen would have to be within easy access to the South Bank, thereby enabling visitors from the South Bank to visit and relax in the Gardens. Hyde Park, Regents Park, Ranelagh and Hurlingham were given consideration, but the only area that was considered appropriate was Battersea Park. This site was considered suitable, as the Presentation Panel explained, because it was linked with the South Bank site and it had ample space and inherent characteristics which lent themselves admirably to the project.[92] The Executive presented their proposals to the Festival Council on 22 December 1948, having initially explained to them that they believed, due to the serious aspects of the exhibitions being mounted in London, provision had to be made for rest and relaxation during the Festival period. They said that "something more imaginative and civilized than a mere conglomeration of giant racers, dodgems and sideshows can be devised - something on the lines of the famous Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen where, to the usual features of funfair are added popular concerts and other entertainments, as well as open-air cafes and restaurants."[93] The Festival Council saw the merit of the Executive's reasoning and agreed completely to the establishment of an amusement park along the lines of the Tivoli Gardens and also that

91. Cab 124.1335, Executive Committee Minutes, 22 June 1948.
92. Work 25/45, Executive Committee Minutes, 7 December 1948.
93. Work 25/44, Memo by the Director General to the Festival Council, 16 August 1948.

it should be housed in Battersea Park but, if Battersea Park was not available, then the Executive should press the the use of either Hyde Park or Regents Park. No further consideration should be given, they said, to Hurlingham or Ranelagh.[94]

On 1 February 1948, Barry reported to the Executive that the LCC (within whose management the park fell) was highly interested in the project and was prepared to offer 37 acres of the park rent-free. Sensing that the Government might not be willing to permit expenditure on this non-educational Festival project, the Executive, in consultation with the LCC and the National Amusement Council (which represented the Showmen's Association) drew up a plan which would make the proposed project viable without having to resort to public funds. The first assumption of the plan was that the proposed gardens could not be made self-supporting in a single year, but could clear all expenses in five years and might possibly make a small profit. To this end, the LCC, appreciating the important amenity the proposed gardens would provide, made it known to the Festival Organisation of their intention to provide them with the site for five or seven years, thereby making the Gardens permanent or semi-permanent and helping to offset the overhead costs and avoid loss. Whether or not they intended that the site should be provided rent free for this extended period was not made clear. The Festival Organisation were told informally that the Government would be prepared to give consideration to a project on this basis. The plan continued that in order to clear expenses there would have

94. Ibid. Festival Council Minutes, 22 December 1948.

to be an admissions charge of one shilling, or one shilling and sixpence, and with a probable attendance of 50,000 on weekdays and 75,000 on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays in 1951, and allowing for a natural drop in these figures in 1952 and 53, the initial outlay could be recovered and profits at the end of the year would be in the region of £320,000, this would increase to £600,000 if the necessary legislation was passed permitting pleasure and amusement centres to open on Sundays.[95] The early provisional estimate of the cost of the construction of the gardens was put at £1 million by the designers. The Executive felt that if on examination this scheme proved to be financially sound a Government-sponsored company should be set up to oversee the construction of the Gardens, with the authority to borrow from the Treasury and the LCC. The LCC further informed the Executive that it was prepared to consider making a loan to the Company of either 20 per cent of the total cost, or £200,000, whichever was the lesser amount.[96] Before further investigations were made, however, the Executive decided that it was necessary for the Festival Organisation and the LCC to seek, in principle, the approval for this scheme from the Government and in this respect, reports on this matter from both Barry and Howard Roberts of the LCC were sent to the Lord President's office.[97]

95. Work 25/44, Memo to the Director General to the Executive Committee, 1 February 1949.
96. Ibid. The designer's estimates of £1 million was later lowered to £750,000 because the Working Party considered the initial estimate too high.
97. Work 25/44, Memo by the Director-General to the Festival Council. 1 February 1949.

On receiving these reports the Lord President, on 3 February 1948, gave Max Nicholson instructions to form a Working Party to investigate the feasibility of using Battersea Park for the Pleasure Gardens. The Working Party was made up of representatives from the LCC, the Ministries of Works and Transport, the Metropolitan Police, the London Transport Executive and the Railway Executive. At a meeting on 11 February 1949, the Working Party's initial examination of the Festival Organisation's proposals led them to the conclusion that there were some areas that had not yet been fully investigated. The Working Party therefore asked the Festival Organisation to attend to these points and this led to a revised scheme being presented in consultation with the LCC and the NAC. From this revised scheme the Working Party was able to draw its own conclusions and present them to the Lord President in its report on 2 April 1949. They stated that they understood the Festival Organisation's desire to provide Pleasure Gardens for the entertainment and relaxation of the visitors to complement the highly educational South Bank exhibitions, and they also endorsed the Festival Organisation's view that the Gardens should be located in Battersea Park. There were, however, some problems which they felt would have to be sorted out if the park was to be used.

To begin with, there was the problem of financing the scheme: the report stated that the proposals had been worked out on the assumption that the Government would not consent to any scheme which could not pay for itself over a period of time. The Festival Organisation had therefore given a great deal of thought to the matter of financing the scheme and had come to the conclusion that

the Gardens could best be administered by a Public Corporation financed from the Exchequer. The Board of this Corporation should include experts from the NAC and from their own organisation. The Report further stated, however, that the Treasury considered it inappropriate for such a project to be financed from public funds, but would not object if all the departments concerned supported the proposal that the company should borrow from private interests. If however, the company had to take this course, there would be considerable difficulties and disadvantages in raising outside capital: for example, in the event of the company resorting to borrowing from private interests, the LCC might not be prepared to take any share in the financing of the project and could well decline to make over any part of a public park to a concern which would be paying interest to private stockholders. In addition, it was pointed out that the Government could well be exposed to critisism when Parliamentary powers were sought and the stockholders would need to demonstrate great self-restraint in accepting the spending of their money on features desirable to the Festival but with perhaps little, if any, financial return. The introduction of private capital could, furthermore, cause delay at the planning and preparation stages of the Gardens. The report warned that if the Government were to insist upon the option of private financing, the Festival Council could reasonably argue against this by stating that had the main Festival exhibition not been forced onto the cramped South Bank site, there would never have been any question of

discrimination between its financing and that of the Festival Gardens.[98]

Apart from the question of finance, there were also traffic and transport problems. The site was in a rather inaccessible part of London which was not at all well-served by the existing transport systems. Sloane Square Tube Station would require reconstruction as well as limited works on the underground station at South Kensington and the railway stations at Battersea Park and Queens Road. In addition to these necessary repairs a further ninety buses, over and above the one hundred extra buses required to serve the exhibitions on the South Bank, would be necessary to provide adequate links with the nearest tube stations at Sloane Square and South Kensington, and also the South Bank, which would further be linked to the site by water bus. Furthermore, it would be necessary to carry out roadworks on the approaches to the site to prevent serious traffic congestion; there was also the problem of finding sufficient parking spaces for at least 2,000 cars. The police would only approve the Gardens scheme if a satisfactory solution to the problem of parking was found. Despite these difficulties, which the Working Party stated were not insurmountable, they recommended that a Company, limited by guarantee, should be established to develop and operate the scheme, to be financed from either public or private funds but which would be precluded from distributing any profits for private advantage.[99]

98. Work 25/44, Report of the Working Party on the Festival Pleasure Gardens, 2 April 1949.
99. Ibid. See Annexes 2F and 2G for the finance and administration of the Pleasure Gardens and the cost of the transport and traffic work.

At a meeting of the Festival Council on 22 June 1949, Barry outlined the position of the proposed Pleasure Gardens. The scheme had, he said, originally been envisaged to occupy a 37 acre site in Battersea Park. A meeting had been held under the Chairmanship of the LCC, with representatives of the LCC, the Festival Organisation and the Battersea and Chelsea Borough Councils. The scheme did not meet with the approval of the two local authorities and was referred back to the Festival Organisation for further examination. As a result, a further meeting was held this time under the Chairmanship of the Lord President and an alternative proposal was advanced: less ambitious than the original proposal, this new scheme called for a smaller capital outlay and worked on the assumption that the Gardens would be opened for only six months, seven days per week, during the Festival period. The modified scheme, Barry told the Council, had met with the approval of the local authorities concerned - it had been accepted by Battersea Borough Council and was likely to be accepted by Chelsea Borough Council. The Lord President and the Chancellor of the Exchequer now proposed to recommend the modified scheme to the Cabinet for approval, with the proviso that the Gardens should be managed by a specially appointed company. The Council discussed Barry's remarks fully and concluded that the Festival Gardens were essential as a natural concomitant of the South Bank and were essential to their plans for the Festival in

London in 1951.[100]

On 20 July 1949, Barry sent a note to the Festival Council informing them that the Government had approved the siting of the Pleasure Gardens in Battersea Park for six months, and that the form which the company should take was still under consideration. The Treasury had expressed the opinion that a private company, limited by shares, would be the most suitable and following this advice, Barry proposed that a company with the title, Festival Gardens Limited, with a share capital of £100 should be formed. The Council, he said, should appoint the Board of Directors consisting of a member from the Festival Council as Chairman, five members of the Festival Office staff and one or two representatives of the LCC and NAC. He added that the Council might also wish to consider the nomination of one or two of its own members or an independent person. Barry ended his proposal by putting forward the names of the nominees from the Festival Office: they were Bernard Sendall, the Controller; Cecil Cooke, the Director of Exhibitions; George Campbell, the

100. Work 25/44, Council Minutes, 22 June 1949. The provisional estimated cost for the six months scheme was £770,000, £120,000 more expensive than the 5-7 year scheme at £750,000. This figure was made up as follows: Capital Expenditure - £500,000 (this included £30,000 for the cost of pier); Running Costs - £150,000; Interest - £20,000; Clearance and Reinstatement of the park - £100,000. The estimate revenue was put at £670,000 with a loss of £100,000 (£70,000 if the cost of the pier was not charged to the Company). The revenue figure was calculated on the basis of an admission charge of one shilling for adults and sixpence for children, with attendance figures out at 30,000 persons daily Monday to Friday; 70,000 on Saturdays and Bank Holidays; and 60,000 on Sundays. These charges would produce revenue of £300,000 and the remainder of the revenue was to come from concessions which was expected to provide a profit of around one shilling per head - including children.

the Director of Finance and Establishments; Leonard Crainford, Secretary to the Executive; and himself.[101] The Government were in full agreement that the appointment of the company's Board of Directors should be made by the Festival Council, as it wished at all costs to dissociate itself publicly from bearing any responsibility to the company.[102]

At a meeting on 20 July 1949, the Council discussed Barry's note and decided that to have five representatives from the Executive was much too high and out of proportion to the number of staff to be recommended from other sources. Instead, they felt that the Board should be represented by only two members of the Festival Council as well as the Director General of the Executive. They further agreed that invitations to sit on the Board of the company should be sent to the following persons: Sir Henry French and Lord

101. Work 25/44, Note by Director General to the Festival Council, 20 July 1949.
102. The Government's desire not to be involved with the Festival Gardens Company was exposed in two letters on the subject:
The first, dated 16 July, 1949 (five days before Barry made his proposals for the company) was from O'Donovan of the Treasury to Nicholson: it stated: "Actually, I think it was you who suggested that the Chancellor's wish to dissociate the Government from too close responsibility could be met by getting the Council to nominate all the official representatives". Cab 124/1302, O'Donovan to Nicholson, 16 July 1949.
The second letter, dated 18 July 1949 was from Nicholson to Ismay. It said: I confirm that it is the Government's wish that the Board of Directors should be appointed by the Festival Council, and in this connection I suggest it would be best not to use such terms as 'an official majority' (see 3rd paragraph) or 'four official representatives' (see 5th paragraph), as this might create an impression that these representatives were really Government representatives which is what we wish to avoid. Cab 124/1302, Nicholson to Ismay, 18 July 1949.

Latham, both of the Festival Council; Lord Aberconway, President of the Royal Horticultural Society and member of the RSA council; Sir Charles Cochran, theatre manager and producer; and one or two LCC and NAC representatives.[103]

On 4 October 1949, Barry sent a memorandum to the Festival Council stating that a company to be known as the Festival Gardens Limited had been approved and set up (it would be incorporated on 16 November 1949). The company would be able to borrow £770,000 (the cost of the gardens), £200,000 of which was being lent by the LCC and the rest by the Festival Office. The members of the Board were: Sir Henry French, Chairman; Lord Aberconway (who would later resign for private reasons and was replaced by Sir Giles Loder, an expert in Horticulture); Sir Charles Cochran (also to resign, on medical grounds, and replaced by Sir Arthur Elvin who was involved in the entertainment world); D.H. Daines, Chairman of the Finance Committee of the LCC; Sir Howard Roberts, Clerk of the LCC; G.J. Hill, Vice Chairman of the Showmen's Guild, H.L. Joseph of the NAC; Gerald Barry, Director General of the Festival Office; Cecil Cooke, Director of Exhibitions; Bernard Sendall, Controller of the Festival Office; and Leonard Crainford who was appointed Secretary to the Board. Barry concluded his memorandum by adding that it was possible that one or two more directors might be added and also that the LCC was understood to be prepared to put up forty per cent of any loss, provided it did not exceed £40,000.[104]

103. Work 25/44, Festival Council Minutes, 20 July 1949.
104. Ibid. Memo by the Director General to the Festival Council, 4 October 1949. See Annex 2H for the comprehensive list of the members of the Board of the Festival Gardens Limited.

FESTIVAL EXHIBITIONS OUTSIDE LONDON

The Idea of Regional Decentralisation

From the inception of the Festival of Britain project, there was a desire on the part of the Lord President that the Festival exhibitions and events should be spread across the nation and not confined solely to London.[105] To this end, the Festival Organisation developed the idea of mounting Travelling Exhibitions which would visit specific towns and cities throughout the country. In addition to this, three Regional Councils were created to organise local exhibitions, with the help of the Festival Organisation, in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales which would reflect the national theme and aspirations for 1951.[106]

At a meeting of the Official Committee on 11 March 1948, the matter of how best to spread the Festival experience throughout the country was discussed. The first point to be clarified, Nicholson insisted, was the fundamental issue that the Executive should be guided by the Official Committee on the matter of decentralisation and that any final plan should, furthermore, have the approval of the Official Committee as well as the Government since the choosing of centres for Festival exhibitions, outside London, would be bound to disappoint many local interests. While agreeing with Nicholson's view, some members felt rather apprehensive about the idea of making the decision in London on which towns were to be designated as part of the National Festival, before full consultation was made with

105. See p. 28 for the early ideas on decentralisation.
106. See pp. 55-6 for a discussion on the creation of these councils.

local authorities who might be interested in taking part in the regional festivities. Nicholson, although agreeing with this point, stated that while he recognised the need for proper consultation with local interests, care would have to be taken to avoid becoming heavily involved with too many authorities before a decision was made on the places to be included as part of the Regional festivities. The discussion on decentralisation was concluded with the Committee agreeing that the Executive should be sent a preliminary list of towns in England, Scotland and Wales which might be designated as Festival exhibition centres, and it would be up to them to compile a final list indicating both the venue and the type of event planned, which would be decided in consultation with local interests.[107]

On 16 March 1948, the members of the Executive discussed the proposal from the Official Committee, and as Barry did not take up his appointment as Chairman until 30 March 1948, Nicholson took the position of Acting Chairman. He reiterated the Government's decision that the Festival should be decentralised, adding that the drawing up of plans would not be an easy task as any decisions on the choice of towns to participate in the festivities would be bound to disappoint those not chosen. Furthermore, he emphasised that when their plans were formulated, the Executive would have to submit them to the Official Committee and that in this connection they would have to bear two considerations in mind: There were some places which had a very good case for inclusion in the Festival as "designated centres" by virtue of established local activities, an

107. Cab 124/1334, Official Committee Minutes, 11 March 1948.

example of which was Edinburgh which was, after the success of its International Arts Festival staged in the summer of 1947, planning to hold an International Arts Festival on an annual basis. In another category other towns might be included because it would be convenient to stage a particular exhibition there; for example Birmingham could be used to stage a Rail and Road Transport Design Exhibition, as it was understood that there would be no buildings available in London to accommodate an exhibition of locomotives. The preliminary list forwarded by the Official Committee was at best a guide which the Executive could, he said, amend and develop, but in doing this it would, he cautioned, be important for the Executive to maintain a proper balance between national and local projects to ensure that national projects were able to obtain the labour and materials necessary to mount them.[108]

By 5 April 1948, the Executive was beginning to conceive of a method by which decentralisation could be achieved. In a memorandum to his Committee, Barry outlined his proposals for a Travelling Exhibition: it would compromise .. a selection of representative exhibits from the Combined Exhibition, the Science and Technology Exhibition and the Architecture Exhibition. It would be housed and mounted in a specially designed portable structure which could be set up on sites either in the centre or on the edge of towns throughout the country. Such an exhibition, the Executive believed, would fulfil two functions: firstly, it would meet the Lord

108. Cab 124/1334, Executive Committee Minutes, 16 March 1948. The preliminary list drawn up by the Official Committee was not available, the Executive Council came up with its own list on 20 May 1948.

President's desire for Festival exhibitions and activities to be dispersed as widely as possible over Britain; and secondly, they thought that it would, stimulate the ingenuity of architects,engineers and designers alike, to formulate something original and attractive, using new materials and methods of construction which might prove a permanent contribution to exhibition techniques for the future.[109] This novel idea was discussed informally at the weekend conferences at Barry's home and, by 20 May 1948, at a formal meeting of the Executive it was decided that the Travelling Exhibition would be housed in a tented structure and would stay at each centre it visited for approximately ten days. The Executive felt that in order to cover as much of the country as was possible in the summer of 1951, it would probably be necessary to have a second, duplicate Travelling Exhibition.

It was proposed that the following towns would receive a visit from the Land Travelling Exhibition: two Scottish cities, Glasgow and Dundee, the maximum number the Executive were prepared to consider for Scotland; in Wales, Cardiff; and in England, Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Newcastle, Nottingham, Bristol, Plymouth and Southampton. The Executive felt that there would be difficulties (which were not specified) in the Travelling Exhibition visiting Northern Ireland, and as such, it was precluded from the proposed itinerary. There was general agreement amongst the members that the list was sound although it was felt that amendments might be necessary. At this stage, it was felt that, apart from the inclusion of one more town, the addition of further Festival centres

109. Ibid. Memo by the Director General to the Executive Committee, 5 April 1948.

could not be justified as it would, they argued, facilitate the necessity for a triplicate Travelling Exhibition which would incur expenses which could not readily be afforded. The discussion now centred on how big the Travelling Exhibition would be and of what it should be composed. The Government's exhibition mounters, the COI, could not at this stage, in addition to all their other Festival commitments, handle anything larger than 30,000 square feet. The Executive decided that 20,000 square feet would be a worthy size but that this was to remain flexible, as it would be very much dependent upon the nature of the sites on which the exhibition was to be erected. They further decided that the Travelling Exhibition would be a copy of the Combined Exhibition but that the designers of the Travelling Exhibition would be given a free hand in organising the display.[110]

On 17 July 1948, the Official Committee sent their report on the Executive's proposed sites for the Combined and the Science and Technology Exhibitions, and the other proposals for 1951, to the Lord President. The report presented the Executive's plan for Regional decentralisation, which at this stage only covered England because Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had only just started working out their plans. The Travelling Exhibition would, the report stated, be visiting eight towns in England; should its scope become more diverse, there would be a need to duplicate the Exhibition in order that all towns should be adequately serviced. According to the report, one or two venues planned for Scotland and Wales, would be dependent upon the Scottish and Welsh Committees

110. Ibid. Executive Committee Minutes, 20 May 1948.

wanting a visit from the Travelling Exhibition as part of their programmes. If this proved to be the case, the report ascertained that twelve towns would be the maximum that could be successfully visited by the exhibition in the summer of 1951. The Official Committee concluded their report by recommending that the Government approve the itinerary for the Travelling Exhibition and to allow the Festival Organisation to settle the arrangements for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland without further reference to the Government, if agreements could be arrived at with these Committees.[111] At a meeting of the Official Committee on 30 July 1948, they received the Lord President's response to the requests contained in their report. The members were informed of the decisions reached at a meeting of the Lord President's Committee on 23 July 1948: the Lord President's Committee expressed no views about the proposals for regional decentralisation in England; the Lord President gave them his approval, in general, although he felt that it might be necessary to make some changes and additions.[112]

As the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Committees began to formulate their plans for the Festival, they each decided that they would like a visit from the Travelling Exhibition, thus necessitating the addition of a duplicate of this exhibition. At the end of 1948, a proposal was put forward by the Festival Organisation that the duplicate exhibition, of approximately 20,000 feet, should be seaborne. This novel idea was naturally adopted and

111. Cab 124/1335, Report by the Official Committee to the Lord President, 17 July 1948.
112. Ibid. Official Committee Minutes, 30 July 1948.

the search for a suitable vessel began. The Ministry of Transport and the shipping companies in the city were consulted, resulting in one of the Mac Ships - a small escort carrier - being provisionally earmarked. The Festival Organisation also approached the Admiralty who, in May 1949, agreed to lend the Festival authorities for a period of two years, the "Campania", a vessel which had served the nation well during the war years: it was duly inspected and accepted by the Festival Organisation.[113] The Travelling Exhibition's itinerary was altered with the acceptance of the "Campania" and the inclusion of more centres, forwarded by the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Committees (fourteen centres subsequently received visits from the Travelling Exhibition). In connection with the inclusion of the seaborne Travellling Exhibition, investigations were made regarding the docking and berthing facilities at ten ports: Southampton, Dundee, Newcastle, Hull, Plymouth, Llandudno, Belfast, Greenock, Cardiff and Bristol. The Admiralty were unfortunately unable to supply the LCT4's which were considered necessary for safety reasons, to provide embarkation and disembarkation facilities for the visitors and it became necessary to locate berths for Campania alongside, at all ports. It was this problem that led to Birkenhead being substituted for Llandudno, as the only suitable port available to cater to the inhabitants of North Wales; and also for Glasgow being substituted for Greenock.[114]

113. Work 25/3, Exhibitions Report, The Festival Ship "Campania", April 1949 - April 1951.
114. Ibid.

Other problems persisted: the Land Travelling Exhibition was designated to visit Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, Bristol and Cardiff, but in August 1949, when the Festival Organisation's budget was cut because of the nation's economic problems, the Land Travelling Exhibition's allowance was reduced by the sum of £180,000 (for an area of 12,000 square feet), and it would thus only be able to visit four centres: Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Nottingham; the Festival Ship "Campania" was now rescheduled to include visits to Bristol and Cardiff in place of the Land Travelling Exhibition. This was not, however, the end of the matter for in 1949 the Festival budget experienced further curtailments: the initial cut of £180,000 was increased to £210,000 (for 20 to 30,000 square feet) and the exhibition had to be redesigned so that it could be staged in permanent buildings in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Nottingham. It would be staged under rigid canvas in a rigid-frame tented structure. Negotiations were carried out by the Ministry of Works for the use of Manchester City Hall and Bingley Hall and also with the civic authorities in Leeds and Nottingham for the provision of suitable sites with electricity supplies and other necessary facilities.[115]

In conjunction with the Land and Sea Travelling Exhibitions it was, as noted, the intention of the Government and the Festival Organisation that every town, city, village and county should make some kind of contribution to their communities in 1951. Although the

115. Work 25/3, Land Travelling Exhibition, April 1949 to April 1951. The whole subject of the economies enforced upon the Festival budget will be discussed in Chapter 4 on the financial arrangements for the Festival of Britain.

the Government fully supported this policy it was, however, made very clear to the Festival Organisation by the Lord President in a letter to Lord Ismay that "the resources in money, men and materials available for carrying out the supporting activities were strictly limited", and that full use should be made, as far as possible, of voluntary labour. Morrison also went on to state that as he perceived it, "it was the function of the Festival Organisation to stimulate and guide the supporting activities, not to undertake their execution". He further added that "nothing should be done to dampen the spontaneity of local responses."[116]

Through Ismay, the Executive Committee responded to this directive positively, acknowledging that their role was to stimulate and guide but always subject to the over-riding sanction of the Government, they retained the right to have the final say in all functions and events which formed an integral part of the Festival.[117]

Following this clarification of approach, the next task for the Executive Committee was to think of ways in which the country could be stimulated to produce activities for 1951, independently of the

116. Cab 124/1339, Morrison to Ismay, 11 March 1949. The money available for this part of the project was £50,000, a figure Barry felt was unduly low, having wanted a ceiling of £100,000. It was felt to be sufficient by Morrison who thought the bulk of the financing for these activities should be met from local resources such as taxes, special funding, donations, etc., thus making the Local Authorities become self reliant. He was most adamant that increased funds would "destroy their initiative and upset reliance and moreover he felt that the Government in the Long run would get "robbed". The ceiling therefore had to stay as far as he was concerned at £50,000 and lower if possible. Cab 124/1339, Morrison to Nicholson, 16 February 1949.
117. Cab 124/1339, Ismay to Morrison, 16 March 1949.

official programme. Beyond mere stimulation, the Executive Committee considered it necessary to propose to the Local Authorities, in some manner, the types of projects they wished to see in 1951.

In a memorandum to the Festival Council on this subject, Barry explained that there was already much evidence of the eagerness of Local Authorities to play their part in the preparations for the Festival. Some, he said, had already started to formulate preliminary plans, whilst others had indicated their willingness to do so to the Executive Committee but were waiting to be given a lead. The Festival Organisation, he said, was bound to ensure that the right kind of lead was given to each individual authority and then this should be followed up with advice, assistance and encouragement. As far as Barry was concerned, guidance was absolutely essential because without it, some of the authorities might fail to comprehend the deeper implications behind the concept of the Festival of Britain. The Executive Committee, he said, believed that the Authorities' attention should be directed primarily towards the encouragement of permanent physical improvements or to the creation of projects which would promote an enhanced appreciation of artistic and scientific values, and if guidance and support were given to them, it would enable the authorities to get on with their chosen projects rather than too much time being spent on discussing the options and possibilities. Barry cautioned, however, that great care had to be taken to avoid any attempt to impose authority from the centre, in respect of the

available options.[118]

In accordance with his views regarding the use of existing resources in the form of voluntary effort of all kinds being given full scope in all the local activities, Barry also believed that nationally organised voluntary bodies should be given the opportunity to associate themselves in an active way with the local preparations for 1951. However, although these bodies as well as the Local Authorities would be involved in the preparations, Barry explained that the Executive Committee felt that it would be undesirable for Local Authorities to assume exclusive responsibility for the arrangements that were being made. The Executive Committee envisaged arrangements being made by local Festival of Britain Committees operating under civic auspices and being as widely representative of the community as was practicable. The Festival of Britain office would, he said, liaise with these Committees through the Regional Offices of the Arts Council and the COI who would also co-operate with any of the national bodies who wished to play a part in local celebrations.[119]

Having outlined their objectives for the local Festivals, it was decided by the Festival Organisation that the best way to approach the country as a whole was to hold a conference in the Guildhall in London under the leadership of the Lord Mayor of London, and inviting the Lord Mayors and Chairmen of County, Urban and Rural District Councils to discuss the best way to get Local Authorities interested in activities for the Festival. In addition

118. Cab 124/1339, Council Minutes, Memo from the Director General on supporting activities for the Festival, 30 March 1949.
119. Ibid.

to this, the Executive would send to the Local Authorities, after this meeting, further information on the kind of response they wished to see from them.[120]

On 8 June 1949, the meeting arranged by Sir George Aylwen, the Lord Mayor of London, took place at the Guildhall. The gathered representatives were greeted with a message from King George VI, impressing upon them the importance of both the Festival's aims and of local and individual participation. He said:

> As we look forward to the year 1951, each one of us can share in the anticipation of an event which may be outstanding in our lives.
> The motives which inspire the Festival are common to us all - pride in our past and all that it has meant; confidence in the future which holds so many opportunities for us to continue our contribution to the wellbeing of mankind and thanksgiving that we have been saved from the disasters which threatened us, and that we have begun to surmount our trials.
> The Queen and I trust that every family in all parts of the country will share in this great Festival so that all of us may join in showing that Britain lives on, now as ever taking her rightful place among the Nations of the world.[121]

The Executive Committee had already decided that this meeting would be used as a platform by the Festival Organisation for making clear what the theme and underlying purpose of the Festival was, and to give advice as to the most appropriate kinds of activity that could be undertaken locally. At the meeting, the first person to address the representatives, after the reading of the King's stirring call to activity, was Ismay. Speaking in a general manner as head of the Festival Organisation, he began with a flourish, drawing military allusions, he started by examining the Festival's

120. Ibid.
121. Work 25/44, Message from His Majesty the King to the Lord Mayor of London, 8 June 1949.

historical potential. The making of history, he said, was as a rule an unconscious process - it was doubtful whether Nelson, when he led the fleet into action at Trafalgar, realised that the name of the obscure cape on the coast would be immortalised, and, the gathered representatives, unlike Nelson, were consciously determined to make history. "We are determined", he said, "that 1951 will be not only the Centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851, but that it will itself be a landmark in our island story for all time".[122]

To fulfil this ambition required time and planning and he cautioned the audience, telling them that there was not much time left to plan and, moreover, that the plans which were being drawn up were as complex as those drawn up for the Normandy Invasion. As a soldier he had learned that one never had enough time and, as far as he was concerned, there was not a moment to spare. He concluded this speech by touching on the delicate matter of expenditure on the Festival. The people of Britain, he said, after suffering the confusion and exhaustion of two World Wars, deserved some relief from the rigours of austerity that "they had borne so cheerfully". He went on to stress that obviously it would be foolhardy to waste money on unnecessary ostentation, but to skimp money on things that mattered and thus run the risk of spoiling for a 'ha'p'orth of tar', would, he warned, not be foolish but give the people the worst of both worlds. A happy medium, he said, "must be our aim and a sense of proportion our guide .... let us not attempt too much but let us make sure that whatever we do attempt, we do well".[123]

122. Work 25/44, Text of speech made by Ismay at the meeting of Local Authorities at the Guildhall, 8 June 1949.
123. Ibid.

After these general remarks from Ismay, Barry addressed the meeting with specific ideas for local participation in 1951. Explaining why local participation in the Festival was desirable, he said that due to the considerations of time and the scarcity of labour and materials, the Festival programme had to be limited and would therefore have to be "supplemented and complemented by activities spontaneously undertaken on the initiative of local bodies throughout the land". Furthermore, he believed that local participation would ensure that 1951 was a season, not only of festivity, but one in which projects of lasting value to the community could be initiated or completed, thereby ensuring "that the nation as a whole, and each entity within it, may be left a little better off at the close of the year than it was when it began". This aspect was, he added, one that the Festival Organisation was particularly anxious to emphasise. He went on to outline the types of projects that local communities could initiate which would fulfil this aspect of the Festival Organisation's aims: Local Authorities and voluntary bodies could tidy up eyesores; plant trees and shrubs; create art centres; form repertory companies; provide new playing-fields; lay out bombed sites as gardens; and clean public buildings.

The last speaker, the Lord Mayor of London, Sir George Aylwen begun by stating how moved all present were by the boldness and inspiration of the Festival Scheme. For his part, be believed that if Local Authorities seized the initiative, they could produce

124. Work 25/44, Text of speech of Barry at the meeting of Local Authorities at the Guildhall, 8 June 1949.

activities that would not only enrich and possibly compete with the official programme, but they could also ensure that the Festival was truly national in character. Sir George also stressed that he was in complete agreement with the Festival Organisation's notion that 1951 should be the beginning of many positive things and, in view of this belief, he felt strongly that Local Authorities, by adopting some of Barry's ideas, could develop schemes that would bear fruit not only in 1951 but would be permanent thereafter.[125]

Following this auspicious beginning, the Executive Committee prepared a booklet to be issued to all the Local Authorities. It explained in detail how the Festival Organisation thought that local communities should approach their projects. Taking an imaginary city as its model, the booklet outlined a possible programme: a historical pageant reconstructing historical events through the ages, crafts and industries for which the city was renowned; special exhibitions of pictures, art treasures and local museum collections; Shakespearian and other plays of a nationalistic character to be staged by local schools and amateur dramatic societies; a music festival and augmented concert programmes; massed brass bands; national and country dancing; a sports festival displaying both national and local sport; the construction of a new theatre,

125. Work 25/44, Text of Speech by Sir George Aylwen at the meeting of Local Authorities at the Guildhall, 8 June 1949. Following the meeting at the Guildhall there was a meeting of the heads of Local Authorities of England and Wales at Central Hall, Westminster, at which the chairmen of the Welsh Regional Council and the constituent bodies of the Festival Organisation were present. Similar meetings were held in Wales and Northern Ireland and similar steps were taken to interest Local Authorities in Scotland.

museum, art gallery or housing scheme, to be started on immediately to enable completion and occupation in time for the Festival's opening in 1951. This programme, the booklet explained, fulfilled three requirements: a new and permanent project to commemorate 1951, in the form of the housing estate, art gallery, theatre or museum; the city surveyed and celebrated its past with particular reference to what was specific to it; and a gesture was made, through the historical bias of the programme, to the city's confidence in its future.[126]

The booklet stressed the importance of contributions by Local Authorities being of a permanent nature which the Festival Organisation emphasised was to be to the betterment of the nation. If the Authority could not afford to build a new housing estate, theatre, etc., they could endow bursaries and scholarships in the arts and sciences beginning in 1951 and continuing in perpetuity. Aside from these somewhat grandiose schemes, the booklet reiterated the ideas Barry had outlined at the meeting of the local representatives and added new ones, such as the provision of bus-shelters with seats perhaps overlooking some local view. As the Festival Organisation's plans for the participation of the local communities began to emerge, one begins to get a clearer understanding of Barry's statements at the inauguration of the Festival Organisation.[127] The whole concept of getting local communities to attend to their needs was novel in a society which

126. COI, CL593, Draft Proposal, 6 April 1949. See pp.66-7 for Barry's speech on the aims of the Festival.
127. Ibid.

was being introduced to the principles of socialism, which in its essence dictated that Central Government, for the most part would, in a paternal fashion, take care of the country as a whole. However, having factual experience of office, Central Government found itself, due to the exigencies of the real world, not quite able to attend immediately to the needs of the local communities, and thus, the intervention of the Festival Organisation preaching self-reliance, was timely. If the concept was successful, the Festival and its organisers would have succeeded far beyond the expectations of a normal exhibition by not only redesigning the nation's homes and towns but in teaching the people how to create a future through self-help.

CHAPTER 4

THE FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN 1951

When initially conceived and agreed to, the Festival of Britain was perceived, as we have seen, as markedly the least costly way of celebrating the Centenary of 1851. In May 1949 when most of the Festival exhibitions and projects were planned, the Official Committee submitted a report to the Lord President on the financing and organisation of the Festival. The Festival proposals would, the Committee said, involve direct expenditure from the Treasury of nearly £14 million. [1]

This sum was considerably more reasonable than the originally proposed expenditure of £70 million for a First Category International Exhibition to be housed at Osterley Park. Until December 1947, it was not thought that the nation's economic difficulties would threaten the plans for this modest celebration. The economic problems the country faced after the war were a direct result of the role the nation played in defending the Democratic sentiments and ideals of the western world. During the war Britain had lost approximately £7,000 million which constituted about a quarter of her national wealth.[2] Her overseas investments were largely dissipated, almost half of her merchant shipping lay at the bottom of the sea, and the exports on which her existence depended had shrunk to less than a third of their pre-war volume.[3]

To further compound matters, on 21 August 1945 President Truman abruptly cancelled any further aid to Britain under the terms

1. Cab 124/1252, Calendar of Progress.
2. A. Cook and C.Sked, Post-war Britain, p.27.
3. Hopkins, p.41.

of the Lend Lease Agreement at a time when the country was absolutely dependent upon American aid. The Americans unfortunately still regarded Britain with her network of Imperial holdings as an economic threat and rival and, as such, they were determined to consolidate the economic advantages that had accrued to them as a result of the war.[4]

The elation after election victory was shortlived and the first Christmas of the long-awaited peace found the Government much less triumphant as they negotiated from a position of extreme weakness, with a dominant American Government and nation. John Maynard Keynes was Britain's chief negotiator in the talks, the outcome of which was a loan of $3.75 million of the $6 billion interest-free loan the British had initially asked for. Repayments, at the rate of two per cent interest, were to start on 31 December 1951 and to be spread over a period of fifty years. In addition to this, Britain was compelled to abide by the Bretton Woods Agreement to which the loan was inextricably linked. This meant that "within a year of the loan becoming fully operational, sterling was to be made freely convertible for purposes of current trading, that imperial preferences should be abandoned, and that Britain should settle with her sterling creditors before 1951".[5] The issue of converting sterling would eventually cause the first of two serious financial crises (in 1947 and also in the 1948-1949 financial year) making economic prospects appear much worse than had originally been forecast and this led to many questions being asked in the press and

4. Cook and Sked, p.28.
5. Ibid., p. 29.

in Parliament as to whether or not it was justifiable, or necessary, to spend even this small sum of £14 million on providing the citizens of Britain with a tonic. In July 1947, the nation was alerted to the fact that the loan which had been negotiated with the Americans at the end of 1945 and the beginning of 1946, and which had been expected to last until 1950, was now almost completely exhausted and the convertibility clause of the loan was about to come into operation, bringing about the "convertibility crisis", causing many countries to take the opportunity of exchanging a very weak pound for the strong dollar and, by August 1947, with Britain's dollar reserves about to disappear, the Government was forced to renege on the terms of the loan by suspending convertibility of the dollar.[6] During the summer and autumn months of 1947 the British public became very familiar with the language of economic beleaguerment: they read about "the Battle of the Dollar Gap", "the Economic Dunkirk", "Equality of Sacrifice" and "Austerity now for Stability Later".[7] As the Government fought to balance its payments and its sterling, the words "cuts" and "austerity" not only made frequent appearances in the newspapers, but actually became an integral part of the nation's daily routine.

Initially, it appeared to the nation that there was little to be concerned about for the factories were busy and once again producing goods; jobs were relatively abundant, and wages were rising and moreover, the weather that summer made up for inclement winter months of 1946 to 47. On 13 November, the spartan Sir

6. Hewison, pp. 13-14.
7. Hopkins, p. 77.

Stafford Cripps (formerly President of the Board of Trade) replaced Hugh Dalton as Chancellor of the Exchequer - austerity did not abate, but became entrenched. As a result of the country's economic problems, every week brought a new round of "cuts" or "lashings" as the newspapers reproachfully called them. There were shortages of basic foodstuffs as well as reductions in house and factory building due to shortages or absence of materials. Taxes were raised and were introduced on pools and betting. The people were cajoled and begged to produce more.

By the spring of 1948 there was a welcome lull which brought with it a spark of hope for better conditions; in March 1948, Harold Wilson, the new President of the Board of Trade, publicly tore up a clothes ration book; and in April, men, women and children raced to the sweet shops as sweets came off the ration. The respite was not to last, however, for by the summer of 1948 there was another dollar crisis resulting in a new round of cuts and shortages: once again sweets were rationed, and holiday makers in western Europe found themselves penniless and stranded as banks closed their doors to them and moneychangers refused their pounds.[8] At home the grim reality of the country's position was finally being accepted and by the summer of 1949 a justification of the financial expenditure on the Festival became even more vital. By this time it had become evident that the balance of payments, which had been buoyant for well over a year, were in complete disarray: upset partially by a recession in the United States, the

8. Hopkins, pp. 89-90.

gold and dollar reserves fell by $76 million in March and by a further $51 million in April. By 19 May 1949, it was reported that the weekly rate of dollar deficit was substantially above the projected level and the outlook was indeed gloomy. During the first quarter of 1949 the drain rose from £82 million to £157 million and by July 1949 the situation had worsened: in the week of the 10th to the 16th alone, the reserves fell by approximately $39 million. It was apparent that at the rate they were tumbling, even with a boost from Marshall Aid, Britain's reserves would in all probability last no more than forty weeks. To add further to the mood of despondency, there was worldwide speculative pressure against the pound in foreign currency markets which was fuelled by the prospect of a possible devaluation. Motivated by this expectation, overseas buyers either refused to take sterling goods or else deferred purchases made in sterling.[9]

The response of the Government to this crisis was most uncertain, and this only helped to compound the nation's sense of an impending financial paralysis. The Cabinet was split over the issue of devaluation: on the one hand, the Chancellor, Sir Stafford Cripps, and the ex-Chancellor Hugh Dalton were against devaluation; and on the other hand, Morrison and his chief advisor, Max Nicholson, supported devaluation. Nicholson argued that devaluation might be the least of the evils amongst the options facing the Government. In this view both Nicholson and Morrison had the support of Attlee, the Prime Minister. Regardless of such

9. Kenneth O. Morgan, Labour in Power, p.380.

opposition, Sir Stafford maintained the line advocated by the City, the Bank of England and certain top civil servants, that the Government should not devalue but impose a drastically tighter monetary policy.[10] By the middle of August, however, the Chancellor had to abandon this stand and devalue the pound. In October 1949 the Prime Minister announced a consequent round of cuts in 'capital expenditure' affecting the fuel and power industries, the expanding education programme, new housing and the larger areas of miscellaneous expenditure.[11]

10. Donoghue and Jones, pp. 437-438.
11. Cook and Sked, pp. 39-40.

THE EARLY FESTIVAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

The Festival expenditure, estimated in May 1949 in the midst of the economic difficulties at £14 million, naturally came under severe criticism.[12] The financial crisis became the catalyst for a complete examination of the financial operations of the Festival organisation. Prior to these economic difficulties, the Festival Office, which had no distinct accounting section, could only present tentative estimates of their financial needs to the Official Committee for their consideration. From May 1948 at the inception of the Festival Organisation, the Executive Committee had been working with the Exhibitions Section within the Central Office of Information in the drawing up of plans for the proposed Festival exhibitions. The Executive Committee issued the staff of the COI Exhibitions's division with instructions for the proposed exhibitions but because of the lack of direct access to funds and the non-existence of an accounting section which could deal with costing and budgeting, the responsibility for all decisions implemented on behalf of the Festival Office would ultimately be with Robert Fraser, the Director-General of the COI.[13] In addition, certain composite parts of the Festival, such as the Arts Council, the COID, the British Film Institute, the Scottish and Welsh Councils, the Travelling Exhibitions, as well as the administration, preparatory work, publicity and running costs while

12. Refer to Annex 1G for an example of the criticism of the Festival that appeared in the Press.
13. Work 25/44, Memo by Ismay to the Festival Council and the Executive Committee, 30 March 1949.

the exhibitions were in progress, would be financed by grants from the Treasury and from other Government Departments including the COI, the Ministry of Works, the Ministry of Transport and the Stationery Office. The function of these various departments was to act as agents, responsible for carrying out their parts of the job economically and efficiently; they were not, however, authorised to approve, organise or accept financial responsibility for the main decisions related to expenditure on the Festival project as a whole.[14] In the opinion of certain departments such as the Treasury, this kind of arrangement could only create problems in the long run. As early as July 1948, Treasury officials were expressing deep concern about the lack of proper financial management within the Festival Headquarters, and the financial implications of the whole project. In a letter to Max Nicholson, P.D. Proctor of the Treasury wrote:

> I am worried that at the moment we have no clear view of what the total cost is likely to be, and still more worried that we have not established any procedure through which we can get a conspectus of the cost and make sure that there is some financial control over the projects which are put forward.

Moreover, he was concerned that the Treasury would be open to:

> grave criticism if the Government launched out into what now looks like being a large scale operation without having estimates of the total cost and of the cost of the component parts.

He advised Nicholson that a picture of the proposed total expenditure should be submitted to Ministers without delay, so that

14. Cab 124/1336, Proctor to Nicholson, 7 July 1948. The Science and Architecture Exhibitions would be financed by the Festival Office vote, which in reality was financed by the Treasury. The Government of Northern Ireland would finance all Festival projects for Northern Ireland.

very early on they would be fully conversant with the complete expenditure required. In addition to this, he stated very clearly that the Treasury looked "to the Lord President's office to accept a co-ordinating responsibility for the Festival on the financial and manpower side as well as all other general aspects." Proctor stressed that the Lord President was ultimately responsible for the whole Festival, and Nicholson as his trusted Chairman had to clear up its financial ambiguities because, as they were both aware, a great many things could be done and commitments entered into without Ministers or the Treasury having any idea of the cost and Proctor said that if this happened "they would all be in for a rude awakening".[15]

Gerald Barry also wrote to Nicholson on 17 August 1948 complaining about the less than adequate financial arrangements. It seemed to him that it was "unwieldy that expenditure should be authorised by the co-operating bodies, supervised by at least three different branches of the Treasury and accounted for in the last resort by different account officers, none of whom could exercise any direct policy control over arrangements for the Festival." In this situation, he said,

> I find myself as Director General of the Festival and Chairman of the Executive, without financial responsibility for many of the policy decisions which the Festival Organisation must naturally make; and the Festival Organisation has no direct access to funds except amounts available for day to day administration of the Festival Headquarters, for which we can assume provision will be made.

15. Ibid.

This was not, he argued, the kind of position any Director-General in charge of a large scale enterprise like the Festival could operate and perform well in, furthermore, the intensive planning of the last few months had resulted in a probable shape of the Festival's activities which would make the present system of finance even more difficult to administer.

The problem as he perceived it was that there were activities connected to the Festival, such as the Live Architectural Exhibition, street decorations, the Pleasure Gardens and the fireworks display which the normal responsibilities of the co-operating bodies, the COI, the COID and the Arts Council, did not cover. Apart from this difficulty, he also foresaw problems in what he described as the 'preparatory phase' which would call for activities that needed financial provisions: for example, certain subsidies would be required for special scientific and architectural research; special publications such as guide books for tourists; the reprinting of books that were at present unobtainable; the commissioning of artists and writers for specific Festival purposes, and of independent film companies and publishers who were prepared to carry out promotional work for the Festival. He did accept, he explained, that a large amount of expenditure on the Festival would fit into the categories already established by the co-operating bodies: the services that the COI could provide would be fully utilized; the Arts Council and COID could function on grants from the Treasury; and the publicity for the Festival could be accomplished through press and poster advertising at home and abroad. There would be few problems, he said, if the co-operating bodies accepted the policy decisions of the Festival Organisation as

binding on their respective bodies. The problem with the system as it stood, he said;

> will not be so much to decide on what money is to be spent as to ensure that normal financial constraints under which their bodies co-operate, especially the COI, do not restrict the degree of freedom and imagination with which the Executive can operate and, therefore, jeopardise the whole show.

The solution to these problems, as far as Barry perceived it, was the allocation to the Festival Office of a central fund that would cover a variety of expenditure for which the Executive would bear full responsibility. For this purpose, Barry asked for the appointment of a Finance Officer, who would be able to keep a record of the total expenditure incurred by the main Festival activities and those of the co-operating bodies.[16] Nicholson replied to Barry's letter on 23 August 1948. His reply was characteristic of the grace he consistently displayed under pressure, he said:

> I do not agree that the system of financing of the Festival of Britain activities is unwieldy and feel confident that it will prove flexible and adaptable to all the circumstances likely to arise. The trouble as I see it, is that a clear picture of finance must follow and cannot precede the emergence of a clear picture of the range of Festival events, exhibitions and so forth to be provided for and the taking of final decisions on the Executive responsibilities of the various bodies in respect of these.

He correctly pointed out that financial arrangements would be more easily made when the scale, scope and location of the Combined Exhibition was known, and when a similar decision had been made about the Science and Technology Exhibition. Further, the financial arrangements could be finalised when a more detailed review of the ancillary activities such as processions, pageants, fireworks,

16. Cab 124/1336, Barry to Nicholson, 17 August 1948.

floodlighting and street decorations which, Nicholson said, would have to be co-ordinated and probably directed by the Festival Organisation. He concluded his letter by stating:

> I, therefore, think that the diversion of effort asked for by your letter of 17th August would not only be fruitless, but would actually postpone the reaching of a stage at which the final arrangements can be defined with more precision.
> I share your view, however, that the greatest importance must be attached to a clear understanding of the financial drill and budget and have already promised the Treasury that the Official Committee, which is the right body to do this, shall get down to it as early as possible in the Autumn....
> I hope meanhwile that you will discourage premature attempts to re-open broad questions of financial policy before a detailed scheme can be prepared on the basis of firm plans from the Festival Organisation and that you will bring to my notice informally any points which you feel should be covered in that scheme.[17]

As 1948 came to an end, accommodation was found for both the Combined and the Science Exhibitions and plans were concluded for the Travelling Exhibition, and, as he had promised Barry, Nicholson began to concentrate his energies on sorting out the Festival's financial arrangements.[18] On 17 January 1949, Proctor again wrote to Nicholson about the financial arrangements for the Festival. Acknowledging Nicholson's reply to his letter of 7 July 1948, in which Nicholson had assured him that he would bear responsibility for bringing before the Official Committee a total estimate of the cost of the Festival and its composite parts as had been requested, Proctor reiterated the Treasury's concern about the "lack of any fixed point of financial and accounting responsibility for those parts of expenditure which are incurred to the order of the Festival Headquarters." Proctor further restated that "the

17. Cab 124/1336, Nicholson to Barry, 23 August 1948.
18. See pp.106-110, 118-122, 143-147, for the finalisation of the housing for the Combined, Science and Technology, and the Travelling Exhibitions.

general responsibility for co-ordinating the financial proposals and justifying them to the Treasury must continue to rest with the Lord President's office." Apart from still being worried about the lack of financial control, the Treasury was, Proctor said, concerned about the Special Exhibitions Unit of the COI, which had been created specifically to deal with the Exhibitions in 1951. This unit, Proctor said, worked for all intents and purposes under the direction of the Executive Committee, but was being borne on the COI vote and as such, the Director-General of the COI, Robert Fraser, was accountable for all expenditure. Proctor argued that the Director-General was in no position to exercise control over such expenditure and that it was wrong that he should be the accounting officer for it. Further, a similar position arose with regard to the staffing and general expenses of the Festival Office which, he said, were being borne on the Treasury vote, with the Department's Permanent Secretary acting as the accounting officer; neither the Chancellor nor the Treasury officials were in any position to exercise detailed control over the Festival Office's expenditure.[19]

This situation could be remedied, Proctor advised, by giving the Festival Office its own vote, for which the Organisation, with Barry as its accounting officer, would be responsible. He assured Nicholson that the Treasury "would not seek to roll up on this vote the whole expenditure on the Festival." The Arts Council would continue to bear the cost of the Festival of Arts from the grant remitted to them by the Treasury, and the COID would similarly

19. Cab 124/1266, Proctor to Nicholson, 17 January 1949.

continue to cover its own expenses in relation to its contribution to the Combined Exhibition. The Ministry of Works, Transport and the Stationery Office could, Proctor said, continue to use their votes for any allied services and the COI would continue to bear the cost for the publicity or for any other services it performed for the Festival Office, for which it was entitled to ask for repayment from the Festival Office vote.[20]

The remodelled Festival Office could be made up, Proctor explained, by transferring the COI Special Exhibitions Unit to the Festival Headquarters, thus making it a part of the staff already working under the Director-General. The Festival Office would be constituted as an independent department (responsible to the Lord President) employing its own staff and submitting its financial proposals to the Treasury like any other department. To help Barry with his added responsibilities, Proctor suggested that a finance and establishments officer be appointed to handle the direct expenditure on the Festival and an accounts section created to deal with the payments to the staff. These additional staff requirements would be met by the Treasury. So anxious was Proctor about the financial state of the Festival Office and Barry's management of it, that he went so far as to tell Nicholson that he and his colleagues thought that:

> It might be desirable to attach at once a good finance and establishment officer to the Director-General of the Festival, even in advance of his becoming responsible for the vote, and to suggest to Gerald Barry that he should be brought in at an early stage on all projects involving expenditure, e.g. by including him in the Festival Executive Committee.[21]

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.

The Government, all too aware that they were being heavily criticised for spending even the small sum they proposed on the Festival, were more than willing to find some kind of solution to the Festival's financial management deficiencies before they became publicly embarrassed by mispent or missing millions. Therefore, on 30 March 1949, in his capacity as Chairman of the Festival Council, Lord Ismay sent a memorandum to the members of his council and also to the Executive, informing them that the Government had decided to set up a Festival of Britain Office, as a separate Department, by amalgamating the Festival Office with the COI Special Exhibitions Unit. The new office would be directly responsible to the office of the Lord President and would become effective from 1 April 1949. As Director-General, Gerald Barry would, from that date, assume full responsibility as the accounting officer for the Festival Office's vote.[22] The items which would be paid for by the Festival Organisation included: staff and general expenses; the expenditure of the COI Special Exhibitions Unit; any other expenditure incurred which did not fall naturally within the scope of the existing departmental votes; and for the services provided on an agency basis by other government departments.[23]

With the creation of the Festival Office and the consequent establishment of an accountable financial section, the Festival Organisation and the Official Committee could now direct their energies to working out the estimated expenditure for the whole

22. Work 25/44, Memo by Lord Ismay to the Festival Council and the Executive Committee, 30 March 1949.
23. Cab 124/1267, Review of Finance and Organisation of the Festival of Britain 1951, 27 May 1949.

project. However, in the early months of 1949, before they could begin this task, certain individuals from the Treasury, including the Chancellor, Sir Stafford Cripps, began pressing the Festival Organisation through the Official Committee and the Lord President to fix a ceiling on the total expenditure of the Festival because they were of the opinion that, in view of the country's continuing poor economic performance, it could not afford even the most modest expenditure on the Festival. On 8 February 1949, O'Donovan of the Treasury wrote to Nicholson in his capacity as Chairman of the Official Committee, to say:

> There still remains the big question whether the scale on which the Festival is planned is within the country's means, and although I know you will disagree with me, I do want to put up to my chiefs here for the Chancellor's consideration the suggestion that something like a ration of the total expenditure should be fixed. Without such a ceiling, whether it is a low or high one, I think that the problem of controlling expenditure by the new Festival Office will be extraordinarily difficult.[24]

In replying to O'Donovan's letter on 17 February 1949, Nicholson explained that contrary to what O'Donovan thought, he was in favour of fixing a ceiling of expenditure provided "it is not so low as to compromise the undertaking", and provided the question of "what the country can afford is sufficiently analysed." For, he said:

> Just stated like that it might imply that the Festival was adding to the excess of demands over current savings, or that it would exceed available labour and materials, or that it was going to impose a strain on the Chancellor's annual budget, or that the expenditure was unreasonable having regard to what it has been decided to spend on other competing activities. If a standard of this sort is to be set up it ought to be very clearly analysed and justified, and I am rather doubtful of its value, except perhaps for parliamentary purposes.

24. Cab 124/1266, O'Donovan to Nicholson, 8 February 1949.

What mattered in this respect of Festival expenditure was, he said, not so much the gross cost but the net cost, which he went on to explain depended on whether the Festival Organisation agreed to levy a charge on exhibitors in some manner, and also according to how much more the Organisation could get contributed in kind without charge to its vote. Furthermore he said:

> there is the further complication that a very important part of economic justification is the tourist attraction; and for tourism the Festival is in the nature of a capital investment which should give a dividend, not only in 1951 but in the creation of goodwill and an increased volume of visitors for subsequent years. The importance of this revenue consists of course, largely in the fact that it is foreign exchange in relief of direct exports, and tourist earnings themselves will not to any large extent come within the 1951 budget.

"It would" he said, "be a great fallacy to suggest that the particular figures which can be taken into account in such estimates of Exchequer expenditure as can be framed for 1951 are anything like the whole story even in economic terms." He was, he added, very much in favour of emphasising the economic aspect of the Festival's expenditure and of keeping the designers and promoters from extravagance. But he said:

> I think a good deal more thought will have to be given to it, if we are to see that we really get value for money and that we do not do more harm than good.[25]

Despite Nicholson's sensible advice, the Treasury still insisted on fixing a ceiling to the as yet indeterminate cost of the Festival activities. On 25 March 1949, Sir Stafford Cripps, the Chancellor, wrote to the Lord President on this matter. He acknowledged that

25. Cab 124/1266, Nicholson to O'Donovan, 17 February 1949.

the Official Committee and the Lord President's office were in the process of preparing a financial review of the Festival of which the earliest of the kind for this year had been prepared on 1 March 1949. Several important points were still under discussion and Sir Stafford realised that these could affect the total cost. The Chancellor felt it to be important, that even at this early stage, some estimate of the scale of expenditure ought to be fixed so that the organisers would know earlier rather than later exactly where they stood. He therefore suggested that it would:

> be right at this stage to fix a ceiling for the total cost falling on the government. This is necessary in any case to avoid creating difficulty with future Budgets, but it would also probably be useful to the Festival Office and to other departments concerned, since it must be extremely difficult, without such a guide, to decided which of the many activities that have been, or will be suggested can find a place in the official scheme.

Referring to the estimates of 1 March 1949 presented to him by the Official Committee, for £11.16 million gross and over £8 million net, he said that although they were much lower than the sum originally calculated for an International Exhibition in Osterley Park, it was still larger when compared with the £5 million spent annually on all information work at home, or the £11 million spent annually on overseas information work. The expenditure on the Festival would, he said, be additional to all the aforementioned expenditure. He acknowledged that the Festival would benefit the tourist trade and the export drive to a great though incalculable extent but that:

> On balance, I think that anything much above the present estimated figures would lay us open to the charge of extravagance. Would you agree that we might fix limits of £12 million gross and £10 million net? I think that it would be as well to have a ceiling for the gross as well as the net

> figure because receipts are so difficult to forecast. I think that these figures should leave enough margin in which to fit in any essential items that may have been overlooked, any excess over estimates on the main projects, or any worthy new ideas that may crop up. [26]

On 29 March 1949, the Lord President replied to Sir Stafford's request. He said that while he was sympathetic to the Chancellor's views on expenditure, he could not give him an answer until he had discussed the whole matter with Lord Ismay who was ill and out of London. He promised, however, he would ensure that no new items which might increase the proposed expenditure would be allowed to go forward.[27] Meanwhile, the Official Committee and the Festival Organisation continued to prepare their estimates of expenditure on the Festival. Three reviews were prepared on 1 March 1949, 27 May 1949 and 20 July 1949, with the location of sites for the Combined Exhibition at the South Bank, the Science Exhibition at South Kensington and the Architectural Exhibition at Poplar, it had thus become possible to obtain estimates (which were in some cases still speculative) for the gross expenditure on the Festival. As Chairman of the Official Committee, Nicholson explained in the report, that when looking at the gross and net cost of the Festival,the primary difficulty lay within the decision not to permit industrial firms to exhibit products of their choice in return for paying for space. This meant that the rent from exhibitors, the largest item on the revenue side, was eliminated but, the firms chosen to exhibit would, however, be required to bear

26. Cab 124/1267, Cripps to Morrison, 25 March 1949. The estimates of 1 March 1949 made up by the Official Committee and the Festival Organisation will be discussed fully later on in this chapter.
27. Ibid. Morrison to Cripps, 29 March 1949.

the cost of transporting their exhibits, their erection, maintenance and dismantling, as well as for the services of an expert guide, and insurance. Because of the loss of rent the net cost of the Festival would represent a much larger proportion of the gross costs than would have been attainable had the Festival been arranged partly as a trade fair.[28] The overall estimates were further complicated by the fact that the sites chosen for the exhibitions would be required for other purposes at the end of 1951. In addition to this, the traffic and other disclocations involved in such a large and widely spread project could be accepted for a period of no longer than five months, and therefore the time in which some revenue could be earned to offset much of the initially

28. Cab 124/1269, Review of Festival Finance and Organisation, 30 January 1950. The decision not to allow a charge to be levied on firms whose goods were chosen for Festival exhibitions was for the most part forced by the COID (who were supported in this stance by the Board of Trade and the Executive) who objected on the grounds that such a move would inevitably prejudice the selection of exhibits. As design was to be an importance part of the Festival of Britain as a whole, the COID and the Executive wanted to make sure than only goods of the highest possible standard were displayed. Allowing manufacturers to display their goods for a fee would, they believed, lessen their control over the quality and standards of the items chosen. Moreover, the COID, who were in charge of approaching industry with the plans for 1951, were afraid that even if a nominal flat rate was charged some firms might refuse to pay and they might find themselves in considerable difficulty in finding equally good alternative exhibits. They felt that a nominal fee might also inhibit important industrialists from co-operating with them for the Festival in 1951. Cab 124/1268, Memo by Lidderdale to Nicholson, 20 December 1949

heavy capital expenditure was severely limited.[29] Although recouping of the initial outlay would be restricted, Nicholson pointed out that a large part of the expenditure on the sites in terms of their preparation, accommodation and traffic facilities for 1951 would have a continuing and in some cases permanent value. However, he added that some large items such as the structures for the South Bank exhibition would virtually have to be written off at the close of the Festival, thus making a worse financial showing than would otherwise have been expected. The picture, Nicholson said, would have been much improved had the Government adopted the Festival Organisation's original plan for housing the exhibitions in steel structures which would have had a high re-use value.[30]

Nicholson continued his memorandum by assessing the liabilities that would fall on the Government, considering first the major exhibitions. The main item of expenditure was naturally the pièce de résistance on the South Bank.

According to the Festival Office, this display by itself was going to cost its sponsors between £6 million and £6.4 million gross. They estimated that on the basis of 153 opening days including Sundays, from 1 May to 30 September 1951, with an estimated average attendance of 50,000 on weekdays and 75,000 on Saturdays and Sundays, the Government could recoup £1.5 million of the initial £6.4 million in takings at the turnstiles. The figure of £1.5 million was based on the assumption that the admissions charge, as yet unconfirmed, would be in the region of 4/- for adults

29. Cab 124/1269, Review of Finance, 30 January 1950
30. Ibid. The subject of the use of steel structures for the exhibition has been discussed in pp. 85-86

and 2/6d for children. It was decided by the Festival Office and the Lord President that if for any reason these charges should be lowered from 4/- to 2/6d for adults and half-price for children, the revenue would accordingly be lowered to £1 million, and consequent loss to the Exchequer of £500,000.[31] The principal items of expenditure in this area were: the cost of preparing the site and the construction of the buildings at £2 million; the cost of display material was estimated at £1.75 million; and the maintenance and running costs were put at £1 million. The net deficit was estimated at approximately £4.5 million, less any net proceeds returned from the disposal of structures and the exhibits, less the permanent value of some of the site and river work.[32]

31. Work 25/44, Finance Review, 27 May 1949. The subject of the admission charge was discussed by Nicholson in a memorandum to Morrison. Morrison, always mindful of public reaction, thought that the charge of 4/- was too high for the ordinary people. Nicholson said that planning was proceeding on this basis but admitted that the whole question would be reviewed early in the new year, enabling a new price to be fixed if it proved desirable. He went on to say that he had suggested that if the 4/- price was confirmed Festival publicity should leave the door open to cutting the price to 2/6d at some stage in the season. The advantages of this arrangement he explained were many. It could act as a deterrent, keeping the crowds down until the police had fully corrected any congestion problems. Added to this he said that in light of the complaints of the people who had visited the annual shows like the Chelsea Flower Show and had not had reasonable access to the exhibits, the last thing the Festival needed was for it to begin with a number of spectators being crushed to death as well as sending them home without seeing the show. This would he said be an unfortunate start. If the price was kept high the numbers could be kept down initially and later if the attendances were inadequate the price could be dropped. Finally he said that with the loss of rent from exhibitors, the loss the Exchequer would be even higher if the highest admission charge was not retained. Cab 124/1267, Nicholson to Morrison, 20 June 1949

32. Ibid.

The Science Exhibition, which was to be housed in the Science Museum at South Kensington, and the newly developed scientific project demonstrating the laws of gravity, which was to be exhibited in Newton House were, because they were being housed in existing structures, considerably cheaper than housing them in make-shift structures on the South Bank or in Battersea. Apart from the proposed cost of getting the buildings ready for 1951, the bulk of the money would therefore be spent on the exhibition itself. The cost initially estimated in the first financial review of 1 March 1949 was £750,000; £600,000 of which would be used for display and installation costs for the Science Exhibition at the Science Museum in South Kensington, and £150,000 for the exhibition at Newton House. The Newton House Project had first been suggested by Professor Max Born, who grandly described it as being an exhibit which would be unique in the world, thus drawing visitors from all over the world. It was to consist of a place in which the laws of gravity would appear to have been modified sufficiently to allow visitors to experience an enchanted world in which people stood or sat, not on a flat floor, but on a curved wall on which their weight would change as they walked about and in which objects thrown or rolled on the floor would travel in peculiar trajectories. The exterior of this exhibition, which would be approximately 80 feet wide, would have a suitably fantastic and futuristic shape, and its interior would be composed of a revolving chamber with a parabolic floor. The visitors would enter through a specially designed approach, designed so that they would be unaware of any rotation; once inside they would be conducted to the rotating bowl and informed by loudspeaker about the magical world they were about to

enter.[33] The Science Council approved the Newton House Project on 20 July 1949, deciding that it should be financed out of the Science Exhibition vote, up to £100,000, and the controller of the Festival Office (Bernard Sendall) agreed to arrange that any additional charges to this figure, up to a maximum of £50,000 would be met from the Festival Office vote.[34]

In the subsequent financial reviews of 27 May 1949 and 20 July 1949, the sum allocated to the science projects remained at £750,000. As a result of the enforced economic cuts to the Festival budget which reduced the amount of money available for the Science Exhibitions, and also because further investigations in to Max Born's proposals revealed that it was possible that some of the visitors might experience uncomfortable side effects such as severe vertigo when suspended in the rotating bowl, the plans for the Newton House project were subsequently dropped.[35] The expected revenue and net cost of the Science exhibitions, which were explained by Nicholson in the reviews of March and May, were based on the assumption that there would be an admission charge of half a crown for adults with children paying half-price, the revenue thus expected from 5,000 visitors per day during the 153 opening days, as well as from all other sources, would be £90,000 and the net cost would be about £660,000. The anticipated net cost was based on the

33. Cab 124/1295, "The Newtonian House", a proposal by Max Born, 18 July 1949.
34. Ibid. Science Council Minutes 20 July 1949.
35. Work 25/50, Memo by Director of Science to the Science Council, 15 May 1950.

assumption that after 1951 the museums would want to purchase some of the working models, which were of educational and technical value.[36]

The Exhibition of Industrial Power at Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, was designed to be complimentary to the Science Exhibition at South Kensington and would show the results of applying scientific advances to the heavy engineering industries, including shipbuilding. By March 1949, the plans for this exhibition, which were being drawn up by the Scottish Committee, in consultation with the Science Council and the Executive, had not sufficiently progressed to enable a costing to be made: in the review of May 1949 the gross cost was, however, placed at £425,000 and the receipts expected over the three month period in which the exhibition was opened were put at £75,000.[37] In the July review the figures remained the same.[38]

The last of the major projects considered were the Live Architectural Exhibition in Poplar; the proposed Live Architectural Exhibition in Edinburgh (which was subsequently abandoned in October 1949 due to enforced cuts to the Festival budget), and the Festival Pleasure Gardens. The 'Live' Architectural Exhibition in Poplar, as has been discussed earlier, would consist of a cross section of permanent residential and commercial buildings which would be financed and designed in consultation with the Festival Office and erected and owned by the LCC. In the review of March 1949,

36. Cab 124/1267, and Work 25/44, Financial Reviews, 1 March 1949 and 27 May 1949.
37. Work 25/44, Review, 27 May 1949.
38. Cab 124/1268, Memo by the Director-General to the Festival Committee, 15 November 1949.

Nicholson stated that the LCC had put in a claim for reimbursement regarding overtime and other expenses which would be incurred. There would be, he said, considerable expenditure on display models, plans, pictures and other exhibits as well as on maintenance and running costs, but that it was too early to estimate the cost of this exhibition and the extent of its deficit. By the Review of May 1949 the cost of the exhibition was estimated at £1.5 million with the sum of £800,000 falling on the Festival vote; the costs of running and maintaining the exhibition were put at £500,000 and the LCC put in a claim for £300,000 as reimbursement for the withdrawal of contractors during the exhibition, special building work to display building processes, and payment of overtime and other expenses which might be incurred. The receipts over a six month period conservatively put at £12,000.[39] In the Review of July 1949, the cost of the exhibition to the Festival vote was lowered to £270,000.[40]

The Scottish Architectural Exhibition was discussed in the May 1949 Review as being planned by the Scottish Committee, was to be in two parts: a live exhibition in East Kilbride, and a photograph exhibition in Edinburgh (which would become the Scottish Architectural Display Section of the "Living Traditions" Exhibition

39. Cab 124/1267, Review, 27 May 1949. The LCC claims and how the Lord President secured their reduction (and in some cases their total cancellation) will be discussed further on in this chapter.
40. Cab 124/1268, Memo by the Director-General to the Festival Council, 15 November 1949. These figures do not represent as in previous cases the cost to the Festival Office vote but, the cost of the Live Exhibition to the Festival vote and the LCC.

at the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh). The costs had not yet been worked out for these early proposals but a rough estimate put the price at £60,000.[41] In the July 1949 Review, placed under the broad heading of Scottish and Welsh projects, the allowance for such projects was still £60,000.[42]

As was shown earlier, the Festival Pleasure Gardens were to be situated in 37 acres of the Battersea Park and were to be managed by a company, the Festival Gardens Limited. In March 1949 it was anticipated that the Gardens would cost £750,000, and as they would be opened for a five year period, it was hoped that the initial capital outlay would be fully recovered without any net loss falling on the Treasury.[43] In the July 1949 Review, a deficit of £90,000 (later lowered to £60,000) was estimated would fall on the Treasury.[44]

Other Festival activities included a Land and Sea Travelling Exhibition which was estimated at £750,000 with a net cost, less the net disposal value, of £650,000. The revenue expected from all sources, including attendance figures of 7,000 visitors a day for twelve days (excluding Sundays) in twelve towns, at an admission

41. Work 25/44, Review, 27 May 1949.
42. Cab 124/1268, Memo by the Director-General to the Festival Council, 15 November 1949.
43. Cab 124/1267, Review, 1 March 1949. By 4 October 1949 , Barry wrote a memo to the Festival Council on the proposed Festival Gardens, in which he stated that the Gardens would be run by the Festival Gardens Limited, which would be able to borrow £770,000 (the cost of the Gardens), £200,000 of which was being loaned by the LCC, and the rest of the amount from the Festival Office vote.
44. Cab 124/1268, Memorandum by the Director-General to the Festival Council, 15 November 1949.

charge of 2/6d for adults and half price for children, was estimated at £100,000. In the reviews of May and July 1949, the land and sea exhibitions were valued together at £850,000 with expected revenue from all sources remaining at £100,000. In addition to this sum, also falling on the Treasury was the sum of £90,000 for purchasing the funfair equipment from the United States. [45] A fireworks display and street decorations, illuminations in London and bonfire chains up and down the country, were initially estimated by the Ministry of Works at £500,000; salaries and overheads for the Festival Office were estimated at £640,500 (and lowered in July to £615,000); supporting activities at £50,000; publicity at £600,000; documentary films made by the BFI at £120,000; a Press and Information Centre at £40,000; a contingency fund to cover any other additional projects contemplated, as well as covering any increases to the cost of agreed projects estimated at £1,5 million in May 1949 and lowered to £235,000 by July 1949. [46].

45. For further information on the purchase of funfair equipment, see pp.399-402.

46. Cab 124/1267, 1268, Reviews, 1 March 1949, 27 May 1949, and 20 July 1949.
The press Club was set up with the agreement of all the members of the Press Association in the premises of Great Scotland Yard. The Festival Organisation felt that it was essential to make provisions for the correspondents covering the Festival as a whole, and did not want the location of the Club to be on the South Bank. The Club opened on 30 April 1951 and closed on 30 September 1951. It had a membership of 575 which included 28 nationalities, other than British. The Director of Publicity was later to admit in a report on the public relations for the Festival that the club was "only moderately successful and shortly after it had been opened, membership qualifications had to be extended to include advertising and publicity people as well as bona fide journalists; it was, however, used to a considerable extent by the foreign journalists". Work 25/3, Report by the Director of Public Relations, October 1951.

In addition to these projects, estimates were made for traffic and ancillary works at the gross cost of £1.25 million of which £600,000 would be spent solely for the Festival, the rest of the work would be of permanent value. The grants for the co-operating bodies of the Festival were also included in the list of liabilities that fell on the Government. The Arts Council was to get a grant of £200,000 for financing the Arts Festivals and for paying the artists, musicians and writers whom they commissioned. The COID, responsible for selecting all the industrial and design exhibits in the Festival exhibitions, was given £300,000. The British Film Institute, responsible for organising a festival of notable British feature and documentary films, was given a grant of £15,000 for this task. The gross expenditure on the Festival, as reported in these three reviews was respectively £11.16 million in March 1949, £13.715 million in May 1949 and £12 million in July 1949. [47]

The figures attained in July 1949 were taken by all those concerned with the Festival as the final figure arrived at after a great deal of manipulation of the budget. The Official Committee and the Festival Office had managed to cut their gross costs from £14 million to £12 million on the orders of the Chancellor who had communicated to the Lord President that he could not accept the sum of £14 million gross expenditure as an estimate for the Festival. By June 1949, the Chancellor and the Lord President had agreed to compromise and both parties had further agreed to accept "an outside limit of £12 million gross expenditure on the Festival." [48] To

47. Ibid.
48. Work 25/47, Official Committee Minutes, 22 September 1949.

achieve this figure, the Festival Office lowered the amount of direct contributions from their vote to the various projects. For example, the cost of the Architecture Exhibition in Poplar was lowered from £800,000 to £270,000, and contingencies were dropped from £1.5 million to the very low sum of £235,000. Thus having complied with the Chancellor's request and brought the gross expenditure down to £12 million in July 1949, the Festival Office and the Official Committee felt that the matter of expenditure was settled.

They were, however, rudely awakened from this position for with the country's continuing poor economic performance, in October 1949 the Prime Minister announced cuts in 'capital expenditure' which would affect not only the fuel and power industries, but also the expanding education programme, new housing and the larger area of miscellaneous investment. The Festival Office was informed that it had to make a five per cent reduction to its budget. The Lord President, the Festival Office and Nicholson were not at all pleased with this request. Morrison took the view that, as far as the Festival was concerned, the issue of economies had been dealt with, the Festival's budget had been reduced from £14 million to £12 million. The Treasury did not accept this view, however, and took the line that the original sum of £14 million had not been agreed to, whereas the sum of £12 million was the agreed amount, arrived at between the Chancellor and the Lord President. It was from the ceiling of £12 million that they said the Festival Office had to make a reduction of five per cent, or £600,000. The Official Committee discussed the Prime Minister's directive fully and Barry,

who was present at the meeting on September 1949, said that in spite of the substantial cuts in the estimates that had already been made and the resulting delays, he was prepared to examine the Festival budget once again to explore ways of making the required five per cent cut. However, he said that he would only do so on the understanding that, as the budget of July 1949 was based on current costs, any higher cuts which occurred as a result of devaluation would not be reflected in the ceiling figure and that no economies could be accepted which would cause the Festival not to be ready by 1 May 1949. [49]

By October 1949, the spirit of co-operation from the Festival Office was changing to signs of dissatisfaction and frustration. They were experiencing difficulties in achieving the five per cent cut and Barry had informed Nicholson that the Festival Council were unanimously opposed to sanctioning cuts which they felt would in all probability harm the Festival. [50]

While being sympathetic in general to the Festival organisation's dilemma, and despite believing in the merits of the Festival, Nicholson was aware of the mounting criticism to it and saw the necessity of making a cut of five per cent, for he knew that when the Government programme of cuts in housing, school building and other vital areas in the nation's life was announced, it would become much harder to defend the Festival. On 19 October 1949, he received a memorandum from S.C. Leslie echoing this dilemma. Leslie said:

> The details of the investment cut may not yet be revealed and

49. Ibid.
50. Cab 124/1268, Nicholson to Morrison, 24 October 1949.

> it may be difficult for anyone to determine the relation between the proposed total budget for the Festival and so profoundly important a matter as the educational building programme. But there are bound to be comparisons.

Leslie made it clear to Nicholson that the Government's rejoinders to the criticisms that he had read and heard were not only not good enough, but they were simply not convincing. The Lord President, he said:

> compared the Festival and its funfair to cinema-going and general amusement; but surely the right comparison would be to an extensive new programme for building cinemas, theatres and amusement parks. Again, there has been a reference to increased dollar earnings. This year during the material period, every ship and every London hotel were crammed continuously but if anyone has actually made a realistic estimate of the possible increase in tourist earnings in 1951, taking account of all bottlenecks and if this increase (over and above what can in any case be expected in another two years) bears a satisfactory relationship to the capital cost of the Festival, that would be another matter.

Nicholson was left in no doubt as to Leslie's opinion of the Lord President's seemingly cavalier attitude towards the problem of cuts, which was that cuts should be made on the basis of priorities with the overriding aim being to increase the nations's productive capacity. Leslie's view of this was made in a terse comment:

> I do not know how the continuance of the Festival (for which I have never found any definite evidence of active public demand) would square with this approach.

He further added:

> If the Government wanted to give a lead to the country about the right approach to the problem of priority in expenditure, and if it wanted to demonstrate to the individual citizen how he should regard his own financial affairs during this crisis, what a powerful and effective demonstration it would be to announce the scrapping of the Festival. [51]

Nicholson forwarded this memorandum to the Lord President on

51. Cab 124/1268, Leslie to Nicholson, 19 October 1949.

21 October 1949 along with his own views on the matter. The Festival was, he said, going to require a first-rate public relations exercise to convince the growing number of critics that its continuance was fully consistent with the cuts which were being made in other areas of the economy. Casting himself in the role of protector of the Festival, Nicholson outlined the areas where there were going to be difficulties and what was being done to overcome them. He said that it was hard to judge the full weight or extent of support or criticism to the Festival, for so far only the Beaverbrook press had spoken out strongly against the Festival, the rest of the press had been generally helpful. Despite this, however, he warned Morrison that "it would not be difficult for a considerable part of the press to swing against going on with it if a good lead is not given." On the political front he told Morrison that apparently Lord Ismay had had a full talk with Walter Elliot, one of the Conservative Party representatives on the Festival Council, and that he had been assured that he and Butler, after reconsidering things, would stand by the Festival, so there would be no Front Bench criticism from the Opposition.[52] Neither man could, however, guarantee the discipline of the Backbench Opposition. Nicholson felt that if the Government stated quite firmly that it was still determined to make a success of the Festival whilst paying due attention to the economy, the vast majority would accept this decision; but he cautioned that a critical minority would be even more active for some time and could

52. Cab 124/1268, Nicholson to Morrison, 21 October 1949.

only be silenced by a public relations effort greater than that so far applied.[53]

As to the problems of cuts, and the manner in which the Festival Organisation was dealing with them, Nicholson wrote that he had received a letter from Barry which showed quite clearly that the Festival Office were still having difficulties in achieving the 5% cut. Nicholson felt, however, that these difficulties had to be overcome and one of the ways this could be achieved was by cutting or abandoning some of the larger projects. The dropping of the Land Travelling Exhibition had been considered but thought this would be most unfortunate "as it would add to the preponderance of expenditure in London", which would in turn give rise to the criticism from other parts of the country, that London was getting the largest share of what was meant to be a nationwide project. [54]

The projects which he felt should be abandoned were either the Live Architectural Exhibition or the Battersea Park Festival Gardens. He described the Festival Gardens as the "greatest public relations liability" of the whole Festival enterprise and warned Morrison to expect opposition from the residents of Battersea and Chelsea, which would be further intensified by the financial crisis. In addition to this, the residents could well present the Government with heavily backed local petitions or some other form of protest against the Gardens which would be very embarrassing for them. Nicholson stated that he felt bound to explain to the Lord President, as he had explained to Barry, who did not agree with him

53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.

on this point, that the Government could save £100,000 and the expected friction over the Gardens by persuading the Festival Office to abandon this scheme. He further added that he did not think that the Festival Council would reject this idea in the present circumstances. Moreover, he said:

> It is probably still not too late to ask the Crystal Palace Trustees in concert with the amusement caterers to put on an amusement programme which, although no doubt inferior to Battersea Park, would get by perfectly well in the circumstances. [55]

He ended his comments by telling Morrison that if he agreed with this proposition, he should talk to Lord Ismay and Gerald Barry as soon as possible. However, in the postscript to his memorandum, he told Morrison that he had spoken again to Barry who said that he thought that the Festival Council would resign if they were forced to accept or implement the cancellation of the Festival Gardens, and so it would appear, Nicholson wrote, that all the difficulties over Battersea Park would have to be accepted.[56]

55. Ibid. The residents of Battersea and Chelsea opposed the use of Battersea Park for the Pleasure Gardens because they felt the proposed gardens would restrict the area of Battersea Park available for exercise, and there would be delay in reinstatement of the park. The park areas that had been requisitioned during the war had still not been reinstated, therefore the residents had little confidence that the areas of the park used for the Pleasure Gardens would be reinstated immediately after the Festival of Britain was over. The erection of structures and services for the Pleasure Gardens gave grounds for disquiet. Cab 124/1302, Grounds for residents of Battersea and Chelsea protest, Proposed Amusement Park in Battersea Park

56. Ibid.

On 24 October 1949, Nicholson sent another memorandum to the Lord President informing him that Barry considered that the Festival Council, normally so cautious and co-operative, would be unanimously opposed to a cut in the Festival budget which they believed would, in all probability, harm the Festival. If pressed to enforce the cut, Barry informed Nicholson that they might well call an emergency council meeting, where this whole subject would be discussed and would probably lead to the Council coming out openly against the Government's line and statement on cuts.[57] On hearing this, the Lord President displayed his total commitment to the Festival by telling Nicholson that the most important thing as far as he was concerned was to stop the Festival Office panicking. "We've got to make our contribution" he said "even if it hurts or the Festival will be hurt much more".[58] Despite Morrison's commitment to the Festival, however, neither he nor Nicholson, who had predicted a high level of criticism to the Festival, could prevent the members of the House speaking out critically against the Festival on 25 and 26 October 1949. Mr Bossom (Conservative MP for Maidstone) asked the Lord President to state precisely the total cost of the Festival projects, both temporary and permanent which had been sanctioned by his Department. Morrison replied that the Government proposed to cut the total budget by £1 million and that he would make a statement to the House as soon as the budget had been revised. Not

57. Cab 124/1268, Memo by Nicholson to Morrison, 24 October 1949
58. Ibid. Memo by Morrison to Nicholson, 24 October 1949. Morrison's comments were written on Nicholson's memo to him of the same date.

satisfied, Bossom questioned the Lord President further:

> Is it not a fact that the total cost of this development is something in the neighbourhood of £10 million and would it not be far better at a time like this, as the Prime Minister said yesterday, to spend part of the money on schools and hospitals which are badly needed, rather than on concert halls of which we already have a lot?

Morrison answered that everything was being taken into account and these matters would probably come up in the debate on the Festival.

Sir Waldron Smithers (Conservative MP for Orpington) asked Morrison:

> What is the latest estimate of the cost of the 1951 Festival of Britain on the South Bank of the Thames; and in view of the economic and financial crisis, if it is still proposed to hold it.

Morrison replied by telling him to refer to the answer he had given Mr Bossom. Sir Waldron pressed him further stating:

> How can the Right Honourable Gentleman expect continued help from America if, when good dollars are sent to relieve us from the result of four and a half years of Socialist Government, they are squandered in this way.[59]

59. Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series 468 (1948-49), 1155. The subject of cuts to the Festival Budget is at best confusing. All Departments were asked after the Prime Minister's directive of October 1949 to make a five per cent cut to their budget. However, in the aforementioned statement we have Morrison talking about a cut of £1 million .... nor is this the first time this figure is mentioned. In his memo to the Lord President of 24 October 1949, Nicholson states that Barry had asked him to inform the Ministry of Transport (whose figure for ancillary and transport work for the Festival was £1.25 million) to tell them that the Festival budget was being cut by £1 million and that it was therefore essential that they reduce their claim by at least £100,000. In his reply to Nicholson, Morrison said "on the bench today (24 October 1949) I drew the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the position of £1 million and he agreed that we could so shape it that the latest cut need not be a million so long as he gets an identifiable cut of £1 million". Ultimately the Festival's budget was only cut five per cent, not £1 million. Cab 124/1268, Morrison to Nicholson, 24 October 1949.

This question, the Lord President said, was highly mischievous. He assured the House that dollars were not being spent on the Festival. Smithers continued unconvinced, asking Morrison if he was aware "that the Government could not have arranged the Festival without dollars."[60]

Justifying the Festival was becoming an increasingly difficult task for the Government and for the Lord President as the Minister in charge, because, as Nicholson had written in a memorandum in September 1949 reviewing the status of the Festival:

> If the Festival goes on it may be difficult to get the public to treat realistically the Government's proposals for economy in other fields, some of which may involve real hardship or the suspension of projects that would normally be considered as essential. [61]

60. Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series 468 (1948-49), 1323.
Contrary to Morrison's statement, dollars were spent on the Festival. The Festival Gardens company made an application to the Treasury, which surprisingly was granted, for up to £30,000 worth of dollars ($84,000) to enable new funfair features to be purchased from America.

61. Cab 124/1267, Memo by Nicholson to Offficial Committee, 21 September 1949.

CONSIDERATION BY THE GOVERNMENT AND THE FESTIVAL ORGANISATION ON WHETHER OR NOT TO PROCEED WITH THE FESTIVAL

At the same time as the Festival Organisation was trying to implement the five per cent cut, discussions about the possibility of cancelling the Festival began in September 1949 within the Government circle. This subject was also considered by the Festival Organisation. In a memorandum on the status of the Festival, dated 21 September 1949 and circulated at a meeting of the Official Committee on the following day, Nicholson outlined both the positive and negative arguments for continuing or cancelling the Festival. After reviewing the state of plans arranged for the Festival, he proceeded to expand on the possible courses of action open to the Government. He wrote that they had four options open to them, they could: go ahead with the Festival as planned; or expenditure on it could be cut by five per cent; the exhibition could be cancelled, retaining only the Festival of Arts as arranged by the Arts Council; or the entire Festival programme could be cancelled. He then stated that, for the sake of convenience, it would be easier to deal with the first and last points and set out the arguments for and against holding a sizeable Festival at all.[62]

The Festival would, he argued, be a moral tonic which was desperately needed in the stressful times then facing the country, furthermore, it would give Britain and the world at large a more

62. Cab 124/1267, Memorandum by Nicholson to the Official Committee, 1 September 1949.

vivid appreciation of British achievements in the fields of science, art and industry. He continued that the Festival had been planned as a great national event with many independent bodies representing all sections of the community offering their services, thus producing a co-operative effort the scale of which had never been seen in peacetime. Their Majesties, the King and Queen, had, he said, sent a highly publicised message to the Lord Mayor of London warmly welcoming the plans for the Festival "as an expression of pride in our past and confidence in the future"; and had spoken of the Festival as an event "which may be outstanding in our lives". In addition to this, the support of all parties in Parliament had been gained and a distinguished body of men and women, prominent in many walks of public life, had been serving on he Festival of Britain Council since 31 May 1948, when Princess Elizabeth addressed their first meeting. After all the planning and the involvement of various parties, from the King and Queen downwards, it would be disastrous, Nicholson said, to even contemplate cancelling the Festival: it would be "a confession of failure to ourselves and to the world and coming at the present moment it would seem to be done at American dictation". In his arguments for holding the Festival, he further added that to date, about £500,000 had already been spent by the Festival Office: that sum and the expenditure of the associate bodies would for the most part be wasted. The Festival would, he said, in all probability draw tourists to Britain, especially from North America, and so help the balance of payments. He concluded his case for the Festival by saying that the object of the Festival included giving an impetus to the arts and sciences, thereby improving taste and understanding in those areas. Those

were, he felt, still desirable objectives and their influence on industrial design and technology would ultimately have an economic value.[63]

In discussing the case against holding the Festival, Nicholson argued that as the country was forced to face the prospect of a reduced standard of living, it could be said by some that under those circumstances the Government should not be seen by either the public at home or by the people of the United States, from whose pockets aid was arriving in Britain, to be embarking on expensive festivities. Moreover, if the Government chose to go ahead with the Festival, it could become a focal point for criticism from all the people who felt they were suffering as a direct result of the country's straitened economic and financial circumstances. Cancellation would be a way of saving the nation £9 million of public money without any adverse public reaction and in addition to this, the cancellation would probably appear to most of the western world as striking evidence of Britain's determination to become solvent. In terms of the expected tourist trade in 1951, he argued that the French and some others might still be hindered from coming to Britain by their own currency difficulties. Lastly, he expanded on another area likely to be highly criticised: the buildings to be erected at the cost of some £2 million on the South Bank, were to be demolished and their foundations destroyed after only five months of use. Criticism would be levelled at the fact that the work and materials diverted for the buildings could have been used for the construction of houses, schools and hospitals. The critics might

63. Ibid.

furthermore complain that if these structures were to be built at all they should have been built at Crystal Palace or some other site where they could have been used for a longer period.[64]

If the decision was taken by the Government not to cancel the Festival then they would have to decide, Nicholson said, whether it should be retained at its present level or scaled down, and the only way to reduce the exhibition was by cutting out some of the major items such as whole pavilions on the South Bank site, or the Architectural Exhibition or one or two of the Travelling Exhibitions. This would, he said, "diminish the bad psychological effect of leaving so 'inessential' a project unscathed". But he warned that "the cash saving would be small and the result would be unbalance".[65] However, before the Government could make any decision on the Festival's future, they had to consult members of the Festival Organisation directly, some of whom although present at the Official Committee meeting where this matter was discussed, had as yet not been asked, or indeed given, their collective views on the subject.

After the meeting of the Official Committee on 22 September 1949, where the members read and discussed Nicholson's memorandum on the future of the Festival, Barry wrote to Nicholson on 23 September 1949 to state that he had decided to "obtain the views of the Chairman of the Festival Council and the Arts Council on the proposition that the Festival of Britain should go forward in 1951 shorn of all activities other than those to be promoted by the Arts

64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.

Council". He was still in the process, he said, of trying to find out the Arts Council's views but he had been able to ascertain Lord Ismay's thoughts on the matter. Lord Ismay had authorised him to tell Nicholson that in his view:

> the cancellation of the Main Exhibition, let alone the cancellation of other supporting activities, would completely alter the whole original conception and render it meaningless. If, therefore, this was the Government's decision, there would be no case for continuing the high powered Festival Council as at present constituted and he himself would certainly not be prepared to continue as Chairman. Nor, indeed, as he sees it, would there be any case for maintaining the Festival Office as now constituted, since the Arts Council, possibly with some slight reinforcement, should be able to undertake the direction of the new programme. [66]

It was clear from Barry's letter that both he and Ismay felt that the entire raison d'être of the Festival was being stripped away by Government indecision, they and their Organisation would play no part in the Government's modified version of the Festival.

The Festival Office was so concerned with the Government's proposals that Ismay felt it his duty to call a meeting of his Council to solicit their views on the matter, thereby enabling him, at a future date, if necessary, to inform the Government that the Council fully supported his views. Ismay opened the meeting of the Festival Council on 11 October 1949 by telling the members that he believed strongly that it would be a mistake, amounting to confession of defeat, to abandon the Festival merely because the economic sky was dark, on the contrary, he said that this was the very reason for keeping the intitiative and going boldly ahead. He was careful to stress however, that it was not his view or even the

66. Cab 124/1267, Barry to Nicholson, 23 September 1949.

united view of the Council that would solve the problem; the answer, he said, would depend on the wishes of the country as a whole. If there were to be found a substantial body of "informed" opinion who thought that the Festival ought to be abandoned, then, he said, it would be a grave mistake to attempt to continue with it. For in his estimation there would no longer be "that unity which was at once the inspiration, the strength and, indeed, one of the main purposes of the project". He felt bound to state frankly that if the conditions he outlined arose, he would find it necessary to inform the Lord President that he could no longer continue as Chairman of the Festival Council. Furthermore, the possibility of compromise also required serious thought as appreciable economies had already been made in the Festival's estimates, any further cuts would risk spoiling the entire venture and again he had no doubt that in these circumstances the Festival should be cancelled. Lastly, he said, the present uncertainty imposed an unfair strain on all those connected with the preparation for the project. He continued in rather military tones that "if the trumpet sounds with an uncertain voice, who will arm himself for the battle?" If the Festival was to continue there must be,he said, a public reaffirmation to this effect from the Government, preferably at a very early date.[67]

After his opening remarks every member of the Council who was present was given the opportunity to state his views. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of the members were in favour of continuing with the Festival. Mr Johnston, Chairman of the Scottish

67. Cab 124/1268, Festival Council Minutes, 11 October 1949.

Committee, stressed in his remarks that the Festival must be perceived as a strictly non-party event and active steps had to be taken to secure the Opposition's complete agreement. If the Festival was to be abandoned, he was of the opinion that it should be done at once. If this course of action were to be undertaken it would, he felt, be regarded as "a confession of defeatism". He further remarked upon "the unprecedented success of the 1949 Edinburgh Festival and the Scottish Industries Exhibition recently held in Glasgow and deplored the contrast between the spirit of enterprise in the North and that of hesitancy in the South." Sir Henry French, soon to become Chairman of the newly formed Festival Gardens Company, spoke next. Like Johnston and Ismay, he stated that he had no reservations about the necessity and desirability of going forward with the Festival, but felt that if a halt were to be called, it should be done immediately. Such an action would, however, he said, "be regarded as perhaps one of the greatest indications of defeatism in this country." He further expressed the fear that ultimately the matter would be taken out of their hands by the coming general election and a new Government might decide to abandon the Festival as a demonstration of its determination to cut down on all unnecessary expenditure. He therefore asked the Chairman to enquire through the Government from highly placed Opposition members what their views would be towards the Festival and its future bearing on the general election. Sir Wyn Wheldon, Chairman of the Welsh Committee, echoed the views previously expressed, that if there was controversy on a political level, the Festival had not chance of succeeding. Sir Ernest Pooley, Chairman of the Arts Council, distinguished himself by being the first of the

members so far to say that he would not go as far as the previous speakers in thinking that abandonment of the Festival would be tantamount to defeatism. It was not, he said, a question of defeatism, but of what was the most sensible thing to do. He stressed that if the Festival was to go ahead, it was essential that it should be conducted on a non-party basis. More importantly, a suitable amount of money would have to be made available for the project for, in his opinion, any more whittling away of funds would be a grave mistake and one that the Arts Council would definitely not agree to. Sir Ernest concluded his statement by remarking that it was his personal impression that for the average person, there was no real enthusiasm for the Festival. In spite of this he was in favour of proceeding with the Festival provided three conditions were met: of utmost importance in his priority he wanted a clear demonstration and, indeed, reaffirmation of all-party support for the Festival; also no further cuts in expenditure were to be made, and finally he wanted a guarantee of wide public support for the Festival.[68]

The speakers after Sir Ernest seemed to echo his view that abandonment of the Festival need not necessarily be defeatist. Sir Frederick Bain, for example, felt that it could in fact be seen as the first step on the road towards national recovery. The Council showed unanimity, on a vital issue they were willing to see the Festival go ahead provided that there were no further cuts made to its budget. As T.S. Eliot pointed out, the worst thing that could

68. Ibid.

happen would be for the Festival to continue with constantly diminishing and/or uncertain resources. In summing up the points made during this meeting, Ismay quite correctly said that the majority of the members present clearly regarded it as right to proceed with the Festival, although some members felt less strongly about this than others and about the way any decision would be interpreted both at home and abroad. All the members were, he said, in agreement that the estimated cost of the project was realistic and no further cuts could possibly be made in its expenditure and, in addition to this, all members agreed both that unity was essential and that the Festival had to be free from any hint of political partisanship. To secure these ends, the Council agreed to seek reaffirmation and further assurances from the Government that the plans for the Festival would proceed without being subjected to uncertainty or change of policy, and with the full support of all parties in Parliament. Further, they asked Nicholson to report their views to the Lord President.[69]

The Lord President had in fact been notified by Nicholson in an aide-mémoire, as early as 4 October 1949, of the very points made by the Council members on 11 October 1949. Nicholson stated that both he and Barry wanted the Lord President to persuade the Government to make, at the first suitable opportunity, a public reaffirmation declaring their intention to proceed with the Festival. Nicholson went on to say that both he and Barry felt strongly that:

> it would be a terrible confession of defeat if, at this

69. Ibid.

> juncture, the Festival were to be abandoned, or even substantially curtailed. We also feel that it would be wrong not only from the psychological but also economic point of view. At the same time. it is evident that the Festival would lose its meaning and its purpose if this opinion were not shared and publicly endorsed by informed opinion, including all political parties.

As far as further cuts were concerned Nicholson said:

> it may well be that some people, including the Opposition, will propose a compromise, i.e. that the Festival should go forward on a less ambitious scale. As to this, we would point out that the estimates of expenditure were reduced from £13.25 million to £12 million at the request of the Chancellor of the Exchequer a few weeks ago, and that the Director-General is now completing definite proposals for a further percentage cut in accordance with the recent directive to all Government Departments - and this is at the moment when the prices of certain raw materials required for the Exhibition have already risen. We both feel strongly that any further request for reduction at this eleventh hour would be impossible to meet without undermining the whole conception and success of the project, as well as causing delays which might ultimately result in greater expenditure than the sums so saved and jeopardising the entire timetable. [70]

In the midst of the discussions about the possible abandonment of the Festival, Barry sent a letter to Nicholson on 20 October 1949 outlining the progress that had so far been made towards achieving the five per cent cut (i.e. £600,000). Barry reminded Nicholson that this cut could only be made provided the Arts Council and the COID accepted a cut of five per cent to their Festival budgets, and if the sum allocated to the Ministry of Transport for traffic and ancillary works was reduced to a maximum of £570,000 (the figure that the Ministry of Transport was working with was £670,000). He went on to say that since writing that letter, the attempts to get the Ministry of Transport to reduce their budget to he above-mentioned figure had failed and, unless some adjustment could

70. Cab 124/1267, Aide-mémoire by Nicholson to the Lord President, 4 October 1949.

be made to this figure, another item on the Festival would have to be sacrificed. To achieve the desired cut meant, he explained, scaling down expenditure on numerous important projects and in some cases abandoning them altogether. The items that would have to be abandoned were, Barry said, the River displays, the Live Architecture Exhibition in East Kilbride, Scotland, the Exhibition of Building Science and Research with the Live Architectural Exhibition in Poplar; and another major project still to be decided involving the economy of £250,000. [71] By 24 October 1949, Barry was able to send Nicholson further revised and definite estimates about how the Festival's budget could be cut in the form of three sets of revised estimates: the first he described as a definitive re-estimate of the budget showing how a five per cent reduction on the ceiling of £12 million to £11.4 million could be achieved; both the second and third estimates, showing cuts of £800,000 and of £1 million respectively, could only be deemed as illustrative. This, he explained, was because while Lord Ismay was prepared to accept the first estimate, albeit very reluctantly, he was definitely not prepared 'to move an inch' further without the express approval of the full Council, which, as has already been seen, would not necessarily have been forthcoming. The cut of £600,000 could be achieved, Barry said, by reducing the cost of the South Bank site by £122,000. This would be done by getting the LCC to reduce their financial claims on the site and by reducing the sum of £22,000 which was set aside for a proposed Press Club. The Heavy Engineering Exhibition at the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, would be reduced

71. Cab 124/1268, Barry to Nicholson, 20 October 1949.

by £2,000; the Live Architectural Exhibition in Poplar would be reduced by £30,000, by excluding the Exhibition of Building Science and Research. The special projects in Scotland and Wales were to be reduced by £65,000, by dropping the proposed Live Architectural exhibition in East Kilbride, and by eliminating a reserve fund of £25,000 which had been set aside for additional projects in Scotland and Wales. A saving of £30,000 would be made by dropping the River Display Scheme and a further £175,000 would be saved by scaling down the ambitious plans for street decorations and fireworks displays.[72] The publicity of the Festival was to be cut by £110,000; the documentary films for the Festival were to be cut out completely, thereby saving £100,000; and the cost of the Information Centre was to be reduced by £10,000. The Arts Council and the COID had accepted five per cent cuts to their budgets, thereby losing £20,000 and £15,000 respectively. All these economies, Barry stated, produced a total saving of £679,000. That this figure was still over by £79,000 was due to the fact that the Ministry of Transport had not yet found a way to reduce their claims from £670,000 to £570,000, and the sum of £9,000 had been added to the contingency fund. [73]

The illustrative second and third estimates showed a reduction of £800,000 to £11.2 million, and of £1 million to £11.05 million. As far as the Festival Organisation was concerned, however, the only estimate they were prepared to consider was the first one. It represented, Barry said, "the limit of further economy that can be

72. Cab 124/1268, Barry to Nicholson, 24 October 1949.
73. Ibid.

effected without transgressing the expressed wish of the Festival Council and the understood intention of Ministers.[74]

On 28 October 1949, Nicholson sent both Barry's letter and a memorandum to the Lord President, pointing out that the estimates from the Festival Office seemed to him to fulfill the conditions laid down by the Cabinet when discussing the subject of cuts, and "that the economies should not be such as would seriously impair the Festival and subject economies should not be less than £600,000 and if possible £1 million".

With this advice from Nicholson, Morrison decided to put the revised estimates before the Cabinet and press for their acceptance. In a memorandum for the meeting, he wrote that when the Economic Policy Committee, and later the Cabinet, discussed the treatment of the Festival in relation to the economic cuts, it was generally agreed that they "ought not to spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth tar". He went on to outline his efforts to secure the cut of £1 million, stating that he had, with great difficulty, obtained economies of £700,000 (the actual saving the Festival Organisation made because they were £300,000 over the £12 million ceiling in July 1949), and was pressing the Festival Organisation strongly for the full £1 million. He went on to explain that in order to make any greater saving, a large item would have to be dropped from the exhibition programme and that the choice of this item would be a matter, not for the Government, but for the Festival Council and Executive. If this course was followed and the Land Travelling

74. Ibid.

Exhibition was abandoned, as the Chancellor had suggested, the effect would be to eliminate the cities of Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Nottingham from any experience or participation in the Festival activities. This would, he said:

> "almost certainly be regarded as a repudiation of the Government's assurances that the rest of the country, not only London, would be given a real share in the Festival events. The storm of criticism which would arise in the Midlands would be very difficult to answer and would severely prejudice the atmosphere of goodwill, without which the Festival could not succeed."

Furthermore, there was a real risk that the whole Festival Council or several of its key members would resign if they were pressured to agree to a course of action which they perceived to be inconsistent with the Government's earlier assurances. The Government could not, he added, prevent these resignations and if they did occur, they would undoubtedly have repercussions on the Festival staff and indeed on public opinion - the Festival would be doomed to failure.[75]

If the idea of cutting out an item was abandoned, the Lord President told his colleagues that he had heard from Ismay that he had managed to obtain "the most categorical assurance" from R.A. Butler guaranteeing the Opposition's support and that he was willing to reaffirm this support publicly in the House, provided the Government made a statement to the House confirming substantial cuts in expenditure. On the strength of the commitment from the Opposition and knowing the impossibility of pursuing the idea of scaling down the Festival, Morrison stated that whilst he was "most reluctant to forego the last £300,000 of savings the gross cost

75. Cab 124/1268, Memorandum by the Lord President to the Cabinet, November 1949.

originally envisaged," the risks involved in pushing the matter any further would far outweight any possible benefits. Accepting this decision need not, he said, affect the main objective of reducing the net cost of the Festival to the Exchequer. The net cost target of £9 million could be attained, he explained, by making an additional revenue of at least £300,000. This sum could be attained by charging the firms whose exhibits were chosen by the COID for display during the Festival. Of course, this idea went against the concepts of the COID and the Executive who both believed that the exhibits would be chosen solely on merit, thereby inducing industry to work harder to reach the COID's high standards. Morrison felt, however, that whatever objections they might have, this new scheme ought to be examined in the interests of economy in public expenditure. This charge would have to be imposed unless they could find an alternative way of raising the much needed revenue and thereby make a full £1 million contribution. [76]

76. Ibid. The COID's attitude towards the charge on industrialists was clearly demonstrated at a meeting on 20 December 1949 held in the rooms of Bernard Sendall, the Controller of the Festival Office. Present were: Gordon Russell, Director of the COID; Mark Hartland Thomas of COID; Jane Lidderdale of the Official Committee; and a Board of Trade representative. Both Russell and Thomas, supported by the Board of Trade, objected in principle, to the suggestion, on the grounds that it would inevitably prejudice the selection of exhibits. The Board of Trade representative felt that the suggestion was open to grave objections from an administrative principle. The COID were further supported by Campbell (Finance and Establishments officer) of the Festival Office who felt that it was unwise to potentially alienate industry by charging a flat fee. The basic fear of the COID and Campbell was that if a fee was levied that industry might refuse to co-operate with the COID and therefore the Festival. Cab 124/1268, Memo by Lidderdale to Nicholson, 20 December 1949.

With the estimates arranged as best they could, the Lord President wrote to the Chancellor stating that as he was now in possession of a report from the Festival Office concerning the cuts, he could with all certainty say that "a ceiling of £11.3 million gross, and approximately £9 million net, is the lowest that can be imposed consistently with the Cabinet's view that the economies should not be such as would seriously impair the Festival."

As if trying to placate the Chancellor's possible irritation at this problem, Morrison assured him:

> I shall, of course, continue to maintain the strongest pressure for economy on the Festival Office and, subject to your views, I would like to tell them to re-examine the question whether some offsetting revenue might not be obtained in the form of a rent charge from the Manufacturers whose products are exhibited, without in any way limiting the independence and freedom of the selectors to choose and reject entirely on merits.

He concluded his letter by forewarning the Chancellor that the Festival project was experiencing rising costs due to the devaluation and was likely to be hard hit in the architectural sphere where architects were using substitute building materials such as aluminium. Morrison promised to do his utmost to keep the Festival strictly within its budget, providing that the rise in prices following the devaluation did not become excessive. In return, Morrison wanted the Chancellor to give him permission to authorise the Festival Organisation to continue their work within the fixed ceiling figure of £11.3 million gross while still maintaining pressure on them to increase the revenue in the manner

he had proposed.[77]

The Chancellor did not have a great deal of choice in this matter as the Cabinet had already decided that the Festival was to go on, therefore he sanctioned the reduced expenditure. Having received permission for the Festival to proceed at this agreed cost, Morrison now turned his attention to preparing a statement on the whole matter to be presented to the House of Commons. On 15 November 1949, the day before the presentation, Nicholson sent a note to Morrison to brief him on the financial aspect of the statement:

> You will notice that at the Treasury's request we have inserted that the estimated net expenditure was £10 million immediately before the cuts and is now £9 million. This way of putting it matches the Prime Minister's statement on the £1 million saving and comprehends both the £700,000 reduction in expenditure and the £300,000 increase in revenue.[78]

Clearly none of the parties concerned was above manipulating the figures in order to present a more acceptable picture to the House. the fact remains that Festival expenditure had been roughly estimated at £14 million, reduced to concrete £12 million, and from this sum to £11.3 million, £300,000 short of the £1 million requested by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister. On 16 November

77. Cab 124/1268, Morrison to Cripps, November 1949. (No date is given on this letter). The figure of £11.3 million was achieved, as the Festival Council was informed on 15 November 1949, by getting the Ministry of Transport to provisionally lower their costs to £585,000 and by reducing the salaries and overheads of the Festival Office by £15,000. Work 25/44 Festival Council Minutes, 15 November 1949.
78. Cab 124/1268, Nicholson to Morrison, 15 November 1949.

1949 Morrison made the following statement to the House:

> As I told the House in the debate on 27 October, the projects originally proposed by the Council of the Festival of Britain 1951, would have involved a gross cost to the Exchequer of £14 million. I had already given instructions for a substantial reduction in this total which was well in train when it was overtaken by the general programme of economies in public expenditure announced to the House by my Right Honourable friend the Prime Minister on 24 October. The final outcome is that the limit of gross expenditure from the Exchequer on the Festival account has been set at £11.3 million. Possibilities of increasing the receipts to the Exchequer from the Festival have also been reviewed, and it is estimated that revenue will be forthcoming to bring the net expenditure, without taking account of receipts for the disposal of assets, down to £9 million. This compares with an estimated total net expenditure of £10 million immediately before the cuts. The expenditure will be spread over the current financial year and the two following ones. These cuts have involved some curtailment of the programme which had been envisaged. The various exhibition projects will, however, go forward broadly as planned and there will be no reduction in the industrial content of the South Bank and Glasgow exhibition. I am satisfied that with enterprise, ingenuity and care the Festival organisation will be able to put on a first-rate effort for the money available. [79]

Morrison concluded his statement by giving further details of the way in which the expenditure on the Festival was to be divided, and the cost of some of the individual projects. It was a bravura performance, designed to make the uninformed believe that they now understood fully the complexities of the expenditure on the Festival - it lulled rather than stimulated further arguments or questions. The Government and the Festival Organisation had managed, through a series of deft manipulations of the figures, to get the public picture of expenditure to look quite simple and clear cut when in reality, however, this was far from being the case. In the course of all this, two episodes occurred which threatened to ruin all the

79. Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th series, 469 (1948-1949), 2026-7

agreements and arrangements that had so far been reached: since June 1949 the LCC, who had been playing the role of generous benefactors, now started talking vociferously about monies never previously mentioned, which were owed to them by the Festival Office as a result of clearing and preparing the site. In addition to this problem, by December 1950, it was becoming clear that the managers of the Company set up to run the Festival Gardens at Battersea Park appeared to be quite unaware that they were sinking deeper into a quagmire of financial mismanagement and possible fraud.

THE LCC'S FINANCIAL CLAIMS

The first hint of the problems that the Festival Organisation would have with the LCC came when an alarmed Barry wrote to Nicholson on 1 June 1949, stating that he thought the Lord President ought to be aware of the large claims being put forward by the LCC for the South Bank site and the concert hall. They were, according to Barry, claiming £200,000 for accelerating work on the main concert hall and £50,000 for the premature withdrawal of contractors from the concert hall area during the exhibition: this claim was, Barry continued, initially presented to G. Campbell, the Director of Finance and Establishments at the Festival Office, by Holland, one of the LCC's Finance Officers. In his financial capacity, Campbell questioned this claim on the grounds that the LCC was understood to be anxious to have the concert hall completed in time for the Exhibition and that it was an unfair charge on the Government. Barry said that the LCC had apparently then withdrawn this claim but had since revived it. He went on to explain that Henry Brooke, leader of the Opposition at the LCC, had objected most strongly to the waiving of the claim and Hayward, the Labour leader of the LCC was unwilling to contest the Opposition view. The LCC's Finance Division was thus instructed by the Council to press the claim.[80]

As if this was not bad enough, the rental and occupation of the South Bank site by the Festival Organisation was being called into question. As Barry explained it, the LCC had let two parts of the site to the Ministry of Works at a peppercorn rent (how much he

80. Cab 124/1270, Barry to Nicholson, 1 June 1949.

did not specify), for a period of four years on one part, from 24 June 1949-1952, and on the other for two and a half years from 1950-early 1952. Barry said that the LCC was unwilling to extend the peppercorn rental period to cover the duration of the Festival Office's occupation of the site. According to Barry, the Ministry of Works claimed that as they were being denied use of the site from May 1950 because of the Festival Office's occupation, the Festival Office should meet the cost of the two years rent and, as the economic rent of the two parts of the site was assessed at £106,000 per annum, this totalled £212,000. Barry explained that, if the LCC did not agree to extend the peppercorn rent for the duration of the Festival's occupation, the Government would have to spend an additional £212,000. Barry went on to say that:

> When the use of the site was originally discussed with the LCC, I recollect that the LCC stated that they would expect compensation for loss of rent, but no indication was given then or subsequently that a substantial figure like that now claimed would be involved. Nothing so far as I know, was specifically said about the rent of the two parts of the site.

Furthermore he said the LCC's attitude on this matter was that:

> having given two parts of the site to one Government Department at a peppercorn rent which covers the Festival period, it is a matter for the Festival Office to clear the incidence of payment with the Department and the LCC is not concerned so long as they do not forego rent at the end of the peppercorn period.

Barry concluded his letter by stating that the total amount demanded by the LCC was about £500 and that as far as the rental of the site was concerned, the line being taken by the Festival Office was that the LCC, by refusing to extend the peppercorn rent period, was in fact charging the Festival Office for use of part of the site which

was contrary to what they understood the position would be. [81]

The first difficulty to clear up was the misunderstanding between the Ministry of Works and the Festival Office over the rental of the South Bank site. On 30 June 1949, in response to a letter from J. Lidderdale, Secretary of the Official Committee, Mr Burton of the Ministry of Works outlined the Ministry's attitude to the whole problem. The Ministry questioned the statement in Miss Lidderdale's letter which said the "the development of the South Bank site would not yet be in sight if it had not been for the Festival". Burton said that the Ministry felt that this was definitely not true and moreover it would, they thought, be most unwise for the Lord President to use this argument because the LCC:

> In their early negotiations with us concerning the site for Government offices on the South Bank stipulated that we should give fair wind to their proposals for constructing the embankment, that we should make an early start with our own building. We did, in fact, tell them nearly three years ago that we should not raise any difficulties about the construction of the embankment, and last summer we signed a document setting out Heads of Agreement for our building lease which embodied the same understanding. All this took place before it was decided last October to use the site on the South Bank for Festival purposes. The LCC might well argue that the preliminary development of the South Bank will, in some respects be retarded by the exhibition.

In respect of the site rental he made it clear that the Ministry of Works would find it necessary to recover the full rent of the site for the eighteen month period lost during the occupation from the Festival Office.[82]

81. Ibid.
82. Cab 124/1270, Burton to Lidderdale, 30 June 1949.

From the Ministry of Work's attitude, it was clear that there would be no compromise. Direct negotiations would have to take place with the LCC, and due to his past association with the LCC, the Lord President with the help of his Office, was in the best position to succeed. On 14 July 1949, Lidderdale sent Morrison a memorandum which he was to use at his discussions with the LCC "on the contribution which they should make to the Festival of Britain". From the wording of this sentence it was obvious that the LCC's erratic behaviour was not going to be tolerated for much longer. It seemed that they would now be made to understand that they were morally bound to make a contribution to the nation's celebration. Lidderdale began her memorandum by reminding the Lord President that unless the LCC were made to drop their claims, the Festival's budget would be distorted and a major item would probably have to be discarded. As it had now become essential to bring the LCC into line, she therefore suggested that the Lord President might be wise to use some of the following arguments. Firstly, she stated that out of the £13.75 million to be spent by the Government on the Festival (this figure included the cost of traffic works and the Pleasure Gardens), some £10 million was being spent in London, at a time when the maintenance of full employment could not, as hitherto, be taken for granted. This expenditure and all the ancillary activities which it would bring in its train would do much to maintain London's economy in the next two years. She continued that, apart from this, London would be getting one of its biggest promotional boosts in both paid and unpaid publicity from the

Festival; all this would, she said, do much to maintain and even increase rateable values. In short, London was getting the lion's share of national expenditure and publicity on the Festival and would get all the benefits which flowed from this. Secondly, she argued that because of this privileged position, London and indeed the Government would be under close scrutiny from other part of the country which had been told that they must pay for any Festival projects they undertook and should not look to Government for direct help. She pointed out that the comparisons would inevitably "be drawn between London's almost total reliance on national funds and, for example, Sheffield which must put up all the money needed for a local show, or even Edinburgh, where two-thirds of the cost of its Festival activities are to be met by the Corporation and local interests". She further stated that "serious pressure must be expected from other large cities which have not been recognised as official centres in the Festival programme partly because so much is being concentrated in London". Finally, she argued that the Festival would enable London to achieve a number of substantial and permanent improvements such as road, rail and other transport facilities, clearing of bomb sites and the like, which would not have otherwise materialised for many years. She emphasised that a great deal of expenditure on the Festival:

> will, of course be ephemeral but the lasting assets will leave London in a consequently strengthened position both generally and in important branches of its physical development. The most outstanding is, of course, the South Bank concert hall, whose development would still not yet be in sight if it had not been for the Festival. Then there is the neighbourhood unit at Poplar; the important experiment of the Festival Gardens in Battersea Park; and other projects such as the new wing of the Science Museum and the Queen's Hall which though

not LCC responsibility, will bring benefits to them indirectly. [83]

Lidderdale proceeded to outline the complete picture of the LCC's claims for the Lord President: apart from the claims for the acceleration of work on the South Bank and the rent for the site which had now risen to £220,000 and for which the Festival Office had made no provision, she added that the Festival Office had been informed that further claims of £118,000 in respect of the South Bank site were likely to arise. These new claims would be, Lidderdale explained, for payment of the dispossessed traders, the loss incurred on provision of temporary shops and loss of other rents. In addition to this, the LCC had included in this claim the sum of £7,600 for removing a dump of rubble, even though it would have had to be removed in the ordinary course of events. Added to these claims, the LCC was asking for approximately £30,000 for the cost of acquiring the Poplar site (home of the Live Architecture Exhibition) earlier than they would have done; reimbursement for withdrawing contractors during the Exhibition; special building work to show building processes; payment of overtime and other expenses which might be incurred. The total amount of this claim depended on what the Festival Office asked the LCC to do, but Lidderdale warned that it was not likely to be less than £100,000 and probably a lot more. She added that, in any case, it was only right that any work undertaken by the LCC acting as agents for the Festival Office, should be paid for as Festival expenditure out of national funds. However, the main anchor of her contention was

83. Cab 124/1270, Lidderdale to the Lord President, 14 July 1949.

the long term beneficial effect which the development of Poplar would have on the LCC. She said:

> It is important to the LCC, however, that they should be regarded internationally as in the van of housing progress and the Poplar Exhibition should do much to raise the standards of the LCC development work and give them the position they should hold by attracting to the site large numbers of experts from all over the world. Further, the inclusion in the Exhibition of Building Research should, by encouraging the adoption of already known improved methods, produce substantial savings in the cost to the LCC in their future work, as they are amongst the biggest customers of the building industry.[84]

The last area of difficulty with the LCC involved the Festival Pleasure Gardens at Battersea. According to Lidderdale, when the five year scheme was first discussed, the LCC had talked of contributing £200,000 towards the £1 million needed. Now they were suggesting that a contribution of only ten per cent (i.e. £80,000) of the total sum of £770,000 would be satisfactory. "Why", Lidderdale asked "should the national taxpayer be required to shoulder the cost of making good the park?"[85]

Not satisfied with presenting claims to the Festival Office, the LCC were also pressing further claims on the Ministry of Transport which Lidderdale said had not yet been fully worked out. They were asking for full reimbursement of all expenditure on work undertaken for the Festival and, in addition to this, they were asking for a grant amounting to £200,000, a sum over and above the road fund grant, regarding works undertaken for the Festival which would have some value for a limited period after the Festival. Of

84. Ibid.
85. Ibid. For the early financial arrangements concerning Battersea Park, see pp 132-133.

this claim, Lidderdale said:

> It is difficult to know at this stage what the total claim on the Ministry would be, particularly as almost all "Festival Only" expenditure is on account of car parks and the coach park on Clapham Common, and this will be recouped by an unknown but large income collected from parking charges. Taking this income into account, their total claim on the Ministry of Transport in respect of the Festival might amount to something like £150,000.

The LCC should, Lidderdale said, match the example being set, albeit with some reluctance, by the City of London who were undertaking the scheme for a Garden Exhibition near St Paul's. The City was providing the site, laying it out, putting up the exhibition structures and cafes, and planning and running the exhibition. The LCC should, she said:

> make its own contribution on a comparable scale and the most obvious and appropriate way in which they should do this is by carrying some of the burden of the great exhibitions to be staged in London and of some of the traffic works which they entail.

Although she acknowledged that the LCC were involved in considerable expenditure because of the Festival, they should, she said, stop considering each claim separately and start considering their expenditure as a whole and look to the benefits the Festival would bring to London. More significantly, they should start thinking about the criticism they would be exposed to if the taxpayers of Britain were to learn that they were being asked to compensate the LCC for various events which would ultimately bring them the credit and benefits.[86]

Lidderdale's memorandum to the Lord President was followed by a stronger one from Max Nicholson, dated 19 July 1949. This

86. Ibid.

memorandum reinforced all of Lidderdale's arguments. He emphatically reminded Morrison that having agreed to the Chancellor's ceiling of £12 million there was now no margin for compensating the LCC, and if such compensation was insisted upon it could only be met by cancelling at least one of the major exhibitions. He further advised Morrison to ask the LCC to put up a larger share of the cost of the Battersea Pleasure Gardens, if possible to the sum of £200,000 which they had originally mentioned. They would recoup about £150,000 of this expenditure and, ever mindful of the criticism that the Government and the LCC would face if these issues were not resolved, he told Morrison that it would look much better if Londoners, who were getting "the main share of the fun", carried at least a quarter of the total risk.[87]

On 21 July 1949, Bernard Sendall, the controller at the Festival Office, received a letter from Nicholson stating that the Lord President and his Parliamentary Private Secretary had been to see the Leader of the LCC and the Chairman of the Finance Committee on the afternoon of 20 July 1949. The Leader of the LCC was accompanied by the Leader of the Opposition, the Clerk, and the Controller. The Lord President duly presented all the appropriate arguments and concluded by asking the LCC to waive all their claims against the Festival Office and to put up the sum of £200,000 for the Pleasure Gardens, which they had originally proposed, as well as shouldering a proportionate share of the anticipated loss on this item. The LCC representatives replied to the Lord President's

87. Cab 124/1270, Nicholson to the Lord President, 19 July 1949.

requests by pointing out that London was getting no Government grant aid, except for a few special services, and that it was not by their request that so large a proportion of the Festival expenditure was being concentrated in London. They had, they said, "undertaken many obligations to co-operate in this national project on the basis that they would look for compensation and now they found that they were being asked to face a commitment of £1 million one way or another". In spite of their arguments, the LCC had agreed to consider the Lord President's requests either on the basis that their claims would be recognised and paid by the Festival while they would make a substantial grant to the Festival as an offset. In addition to this, they agreed to reconsider the amount of money they were prepared to put towards the Festival Gardens.[88]

On 9 August 1949, Nicholson sent a memorandum to the Lord President explaining the LCC's position. He said that the LCC had based their arguments on the assumption that they would be reimbursed for any extra costs incurred in getting the Festival ready for 1951 and thus, from this point of view, they preferred to maintain their claims and have them met. After their meeting with the Lord President on 20 July, however, the LCC realised that the Government would only accept this if they agreed to make a substantial offsetting contribution to the Festival; but the LCC said that they could not do this or even agree to it at that time. Nicholson continued by outlining the views of the Clerk of the LCC on this matter; Sir Howard Roberts had pointed out that when an attempt is made to fix figures were adopted as the basis for a deal

88. Cab 124/1270, Nicholson to Sendall, 21 July 1949.

with the Government and the estimates proved different in reality then both parties could, he warned, be acutely embarrassed. He argued therefore that a possible solution might lie in the Government taking note of the existence of these claims, and while bearing in mind the ceiling on Festival expenditure, agreeing that the LCC do their utmost to keep excess costs down for all work carried out for the Festival. When the Festival projects were successfully concluded the LCC could then, Roberts said, present a claim to the Government that would take into account only the expenditure incurred, but the contribution which the Festival would by then have made to the promotion of London's development and rateable value.[89]

Sir Howard's points were not lost on Nicholson who saw that the room to manoeuvre was small indeed. He wrote:

> Obviously it would be preferable, if it were possible to get a clear cut solution at this time, but quite apart from the LCC politics, any settlement based on estimates made before the event is likely to be very uncertain, and there are serious objections to letting it become widely known that large amounts have been provided for overtime and other claims which might still be kept below the present estimates by good management and an effort on the part of the contractors and all concerned.

He concluded his memorandum by asking Morrison for permission to write to Sir Howard to suggest that the effort to reach a final settlement could be abandoned if both parties could agree on an acceptable exchange of letters.

> which, while taking note that the LCC would eventually be putting forward the claims, would preserve the Government and the Festival of Britain from having to make a provision to meet these claims on a scale which would be inconsistent with the maintenance of the £12 million ceiling. [90]

89. Cab 124/1270, Nicholson to the Lord President, 9 August 1949.
90. Ibid.

Whatever approach was taken by the Lord President's Office, it could not, it seemed, bring the speedy and quiet conclusion that Nicholson and Morrison had hoped for.

On 16 August 1949, Nicholson sent a letter to O'Donovan of the Treasury stating that Sir Howard Roberts had informed him that the LCC were deadlocked over their response to the Lord President's requests to waive their claims or to make an offsetting contribution to the Festival. Nicholson explained that the problem was that there had been some difficulty reaching an agreed two-party policy on the matter within the LCC, because the Opposition on the Council had at each stage made their agreement to 1951 expenditure conditional on the recovery from the Government any excess cost incurred in respect of the projects carried out which were either useful only for 1951, more expensive to get ready by 1951, or accelerated for 1951. Added to this, he said that:

> the Opposition are committed as an electoral point to claiming that the present majority on the LCC is too subservient to the Government and does not press the interests of the London taxpayer.

Thus he concluded that the Opposition would, in these circumstances, be highly unlikely to agree to a settlement along the lines proposed by the Lord President.[91] Beyond the intractability of the Opposition, the Government were not at all keen to arrive at a settlement based on the LCC's speculative figures. They objected to these estimates for a number of reasons, cited as follows - they believed that the figures being presented by the LCC were highly inflated for work which the LCC claimed to have accelerated for

91. Cab 123/1270, Nicholson to O'Donovan, 16 August 1949.

1951: they felt that if a settlement based on these figures was achieved, the contractors and Council Officials would lose all incentive to keep the costs down. Added to this, the Government were afraid that if the figures and agreements were to become public, they and the LCC might be placed in an embarrassing position, appearing to have made poor decisions in a seemingly 'ad hoc' manner, therefore exposing themselves to criticism for having entered into commitments without knowing the full facts and figures. Reiterating a point often used, they were convinced that the Festival in London would, bring a great many advantages. The visitors to London from the provinces and abroad would be spending large sums of money with businesses which paid rates to the LCC, and it was expected that a lot of lasting rateable value would be created in the South Bank area. In addition to all this, the Government was giving the LCC's concert hall (which Nicholson said could have become a white elephant losing money annually) a great publicity boost and launching. From the Government point of view as expressed by Nicholson, the LCC really had no right to ask for money on top of all the favours being thrown in their direction.[92]

Thus, in light of the inability of both sides to reach a compromise and therefore a settlement, Nicholson suggested that it would perhaps be better if all negotiations were postponed until 1951, a course which he said that as far as he understood, the LCC would prefer. However, this approach would, he said present its own peculiar difficulty, as an adequate sum (agreed to by the Treasury

92. Ibid.

and Festival Office) to cover the LCC's claims had to be included in the Festival's budget. If an agreement could be reached between the Festival Office and the Treasury, an agreed sum could be inserted into the budget under the contingency section. If this option was pursued, a letter agreed to by the Treasury could be sent to the LCC stating that:

> In view of the deadlock of which the Clerk has informed me, it seems unprofitable to pursue the Lord President's proposals for reaching a final settlement at this stage, and that the Lord President would be prepared in the circumstances to let the LCC claims be put forward and argued on the basis of the financial outturn for the various items in 1951, or as soon as possible afterwards.

If the LCC officials accepted these proposals the Government could then say that while taking note of these claims, it could not commit itself in any way about the nature of the settlement and it would be, Nicholson cleverly pointed out, "for the LCC to convince the Government of the day that reimbursement is justified on each claim which they present, having regard to the benefits which will accrue to London". He said that the Lord President feels,

> confident that, as the full value of the Festival to London unfolds, and the happy partnership between the Festival Office and the LCC, there should be no difficulty in disposing of the matter in a way which would be mutually acceptable when the full financial implications are known.

He ended his letter to O'Donovan by emphasising that, while he knew this was not necessarily the most satisfactory solution to the problem, he was sure that the majority party at the LCC and its officers were extremely sympathetic to the proposition that the claims should not be pressed, but were prevented from following this view by political pressure.[93]

93. Ibid.

On 24 August 1949, O'Donovan informed G. Campbell, the Finance and Establishment's Officer at the Festival Office, that the LCC claims could be left over until 1951, on the understanding that, purely for internal Government accounting purposes and without telling the LCC, a sum of £200,000 should be provided against this contingency.[94] On 26 September, Lidderdale sent a memorandum to Nicholson stating that the Lord President had been to see Mr Hayward, the Leader of the LCC. At this meeting, Hayward proposed that the Government should pay the LCC £500,000 to cover all claims, thereby resolving the whole subject of LCC claims. He also told the Lord President that the LCC was going to recommend to its General Purposes Committee that £200,000 should be invested in the Pleasure Gardens.[95]

On the following day, Nicholson sent a memorandum to Morrison to offer him some guidance as to the best way to handle this new approach from the LCC. He remained adamant that the LCC was not to get any money until the Festival was over. He said:

> I would advise you to tell Mr Daines (the Chairman of the Finance Committee of the LCC) that you are sorry the LCC have not been able to decide at this stage to do the big thing and waive their claims, or to give the counterpart, and that as the extra costs and the benefits to the LCC are at present so difficult to assess, you do not think it would be profitable to start bargaining about the figure until the project in respect of which claims are proposed have been completed, and that the LCC and the Government can then review the matter without prejudice either way. The Government, however, will probably wish then to abide by the proposals they have already made, and hope that by that time, the Festival will be such an acknowledged success, and that the LCC fears about extra costs will prove so exaggerated, that in view of the benefits to London and its rateable value you would be confident that the LCC would then agree with you.

94. Cab 124/1270, O'Donovan to Campbell, 24 August 1949.
Ibid. Memo by Nicholson to the Lord President, 27 Sept 1949.
95. Ibid. Lidderdale to Nicholson, 26 September 1949.

He continued that if Daines accepted this proposition, which he felt would have the support of the Clerk of the LCC, Sir Howard Roberts, then he advised that letters between the Lord President and the Leader of the LCC, I.J. Hayward, be exchanged stating that the matter had been concluded for the present. He further added that if Daines continued to press for an early settlement, he should be told that his request for £500,000 would gravely undermine the Festival project which was barely managing to keep intact after several economic cuts.[96]

By 1 October 1949, the LCC were finally beginning to realise that they were fighting a losing battle. Nicholson sent a memorandum to O'Donovan to say that Hayward and Daines, respectively the Leader and the Chairman of the LCC, had been to see the Lord President and that the Lord President was asking Nicholson to arrange with Sir Howard, the Clerk of the LCC, for an exchange of letters, stating that the LCC's claims would be dealt with after 1951. The LCC had now agreed that this approach would be acceptable.[97]

On 26 January 1950, the controversy over the claims was finally settled with a highly diplomatic letter from the Lord President to Hayward, the Leader of the LCC. He began by stating that the Government greatly appreciated "the helpful and energetic part" which the LCC were playing in promoting the various aspects of the Festival. Some of the works, he continued,

> which will contribute to the success of the Festival are of a

96. Cab 124/1270, Nicholson to the Lord President, 27 September 1949.
97. Cab 124/1270, Nicholson to O'Donovan, 1 October 1949.

> long term nature, and from the manner and timing of their execution have not raised any question of claim for Government grant, except in so far as some of them, such as road works, qualify for grant in the normal course of administration. In other cases the LCC have undertaken work, for instance the South Bank site, virtually as agents of the Festival Organisation or the Ministry of Transport, and the whole cost of such work will be met out of the appropriate vote.

Outside this area of expenditure, there remained, he said a miscellaneous range of cases in which expenditure was being "incurred by the LCC either mainly or partly in connection with the Festival, or on a greater scale than would have been necessary if the work did not need to be completed in time for 1951." For expenditure in respect of such items, the LCC had asked, he said, for recoupments from the Government. Of this request, he said:

> As I have explained to you and some of your colleagues, the Government have felt that while sympathising with this attitude, it is also necessary to take into account that the Festival will involve a very large sum of Government money, and the attraction thereby to London of a very large spending by visitors both from overseas and from other parts of the country. In view of this, and of the great contribution which the Festival should make to forwarding the Council's long-term plans for South Bank development, it would in the Government's view be most equitable if some at any rate of the LCC's claims in respect of the Festival were to be waived or offset by an equivalent grant from the LCC to Festival funds, in recognition of the outstanding benefits which this large national expenditure and effort will incidentally bring to the Administrative County of London.

The benefits the Festival was bringing to London was, he said, well illustrated for example, by the concert hall - "a great LCC enterprise which had received special facilities from the Government to make possible its completion by 1951." Furthermore the concert hall would be receiving a big publicity boost and opening because of the Festival.[98]

98. Cab 124/1270, Morrison to Hayward, 26 January 1950.

As far as the specific claims were concerned, Morrison said that "it would be impracticable at the present stage to compute the amounts which the LCC consider should be re-imbursed as some of the factors in the contribution are unknown and likely to remain unknown for a lengthy period (e.g. until the Exhibition is over)". The claims as they stood at the time of his writing to the LCC were £240,000 for the concert hall in respect of completion in time for1951 and extra costs for suspension of building on the site in 1951; £40,000 for loss of rents on the South Bank site; £25,000 for removal of river piers, mounting temporary bridges and reinstatement of works on the South Bank site; £40,000 for expediting the acquisition, clearance and building on Unit No.9, Poplar; £55,000 for early acquisition, clearance and ex gratia payments to tenants, and special work for Festival needs on the South Bank site; in addition was £424,000 for roundabouts (specifically for 1951), river piers, car parks and temporary bridges. Both sides, Morrison concluded in respect of these claims had agreed that further discussions regarding them should be adjourned until the LCC were in a position to ascertain more precisely how much extra cost had actually been incurred by them in respect of the Festival. When this information was available they could present their claims to the Government and they would be discussed without prejudice at that time. He ended his letter by thanking the LCC for all the trouble they had taken to help narrow the gulf between both sides.[99]

99. Ibid.

The LCC had very little choice in this matter, their only option was to accept these proposals. On 15 February 1950, I.J. Hayward, the Leader of the LCC, wrote to Morrison:

> I have had the advantage of the controllers of the Council's scrutiny of the figures and the statements in your letter about the timing of the various claims, and I agree that the position as there described represents the understanding reached between us.

He added, however:

> You will, of course, realise that nothing I have said commits the Council, nor indeed, as no-one knows better than yourself, could I commit the Council in any way, to the acceptance of the proposition put forward as the Government's view in the third paragraph of your letter, namely that it would be equitable if part of the Council's claim were to be waived or offset by an equivalent grant from the Council to Festival funds.

He concluded his letter by thanking Morrison for the full and frank manner in which he had handled these difficult problems.[100]

Thus, the Festival Office appeared to have settled the difference with the LCC - at least until after 1951. However, before all parties concerned could turn their attention to the composition of the Festival exhibitions, the Government and the Festival Organisation were to be confronted with alarming problems from the Festival Pleasure Gardens in Battersea Park.

100. Cab 124/1270, Hayward to Morrison, 15 February 1950.

THE PLEASURE GARDENS:

ALLEGATIONS OF FRAUD AND MISMANAGEMENT

By December 1950 and in the early months of 1951, it was becoming increasingly evident to the members of the Treasury, the Lord President's Office and the Ministry of Works that the financial situation at Battersea was in need of close scrutiny. The Chairman of the Festival Gardens Company Limited, Sir Henry French, had written to the Lord President on 18 December 1950, stating that it had proved impossible to observe the normal process of economic planning on the site and that events had moved ahead of both the Board and its Officers.[101] Sir Henry asked the Lord President to make an additional loan to the Company, who had already been allowed to borrow £770,000 for the construction of the Gardens. With this letter it was to become clear that the financial management of the Gardens had reached crisis point.

The Pleasure Gardens were first considered by the Executive in June 1948. The LCC offered the Festival Organisation thirty-seven acres in Battersea Park and a five year scheme for operating the Gardens was drawn up. The plan created by the LCC and the Executive was based on the assumption that the proposed Gardens could not be made self-supporting in a single year, but could clear all expenses in five years and possibly make a small profit. In view of this, the LCC agreed to make over the thirty-seven acre site for five to seven years, thereby making the Gardens permanent or semi-permanent thus helping to cover the overhead costs and avoiding losses. The

101. Cab 124/1278, French to Morrison, 18 December 1950.

Festival Organisation was told informally that the Government was prepared to give consideration to a project on this basis. The plan continued that in order to clear expenses there would have to be an admissions charge of one shilling or one shilling and sixpence, and with probable attendance figures in 1951 in the region of 50,000 on weekdays and 75,000 on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays, allowing for a natural drop in these figures in 1952 and 1953, with a possible recovery in 1954 and 1955, the initial outlay could be recovered at the end of five years. Profits would be in the region of £320,000, increasing to £600,000 if legislation was passed permitting pleasure centres and amusement parks to be opened on Sundays. The early provisional estimate of the cost of construction of the Gardens was put at £1 million by the designers (this sum was later lowered to £750,000).[102]

The Executive felt that if on examination this scheme proved to be financially sound, a Government-sponsored company, with the authority to borrow from the Treasury and the LCC should be set up to oversee the construction of the Gardens. The LCC further informed the Executive that it was prepared to consider making a loan to the Company of either twenty per cent of the total cost or £200,000, whichever was the lesser amount. Reports of the Executive's and LCC's plans were sent to the Lord President who asked the Official Committee to set up a Working Party to investigate the use of the park for this purpose. After meetings of the Borough Councils of Battersea and Chelsea, it was decided that

102. Work 25/44, Memo by the Director General to the Executive Committee, 1 February 1949.

the Pleasure Gardens could be situated in Battersea Park but only for six months (extended on 1 June 1949, to one year) not for the originally envisaged period of five to seven years. On 16 November 1949, a Company, known as the Festival Gardens Limited, was formed and incorporated to run the Gardens; it would be allowed to borrow up to £770,000 (i.e. the cost of the Gardens), £200,000 of which was being lent by the LCC, the remainder coming from the Festival vote.[103] On 25 November the Company held its first Board meeting, beginning with the task of finding designers and contractors to carry out the work on the site. On 2 February 1950, the Officers of the Company met to discuss the selection of contractors, during the course of which they agreed to rule out the major firms such as Higgs and Hill, MacAlpine, Costains, Cubitts and Peter Lind, on the grounds that they were fully employed on work for the Festival Office at the South Bank and also for the Ministry of Works and, as in the case of Peter Lind, they were essentially heavy builders. Howard Lobb, the Chairman of the Architectural Council, recommended the firm of Lavender MacMillan, whilst, G. Campbell of the Festival Office suggested the firm of Kirk & Kirk, and the Company's Quantity Surveyor proposed the firm of Dowsetts. The Company Directors decided to send out invitations to these three firms to submit tenders for work on the Pleasure Gardens.[104]

The three firms duly submitted tenders which were all comparatively close to one another: Lavender MacMillan's was

103. Work 25/44, Memorandum by the Director General to the Festival Council, 4 October 1949.
104. Cab 124/1278, Marwick to Stokes, Notes pertaining to the Festival Gardens position.

£535,777.12s.4d, with the work being completed in fifty-four weeks; and Kirk & Kirk's was £525,496, with a fifty-two week completion schedule. The Board decided to award the contract to Dowsetts which was a most unusual choice because Dowsetts were a firm of Civil Engineering Contractors, not Building Contractors, and the work to be carried out on the Battersea Park site was of a building nature - not an engineering nature. However, what prompted the Board to choose Dowsetts tender was that it was the lowest, even so, the difference between Dowsetts bid and that of Kirk & Kirk's was minimal, a mere £1,211. The contract was awarded to Dowsetts on 29 March 1950 and they began work on 1 April 1950. By this date the Company was only able to make available nine acres of the site on which work could begin, with a further sixteen acres being turned over to them in June 1950 and the remaining twelve acres in October 1950. The reason for the delays in making the site available was because the co-ordinating architects and designers as well as the Quantity Surveyors (who had been formally appointed on 26 January 1950) had only prepared a very general layout of the site which they changed and added to in the months that followed. As a result, the layout of the buildings and the site was neither fixed nor approved by the time the contractors arrived on the site.[105]

The work proceeded extremely slowly during the summer months and the bulk of it was thus being carried out in the winter in inclement weather conditions, furthermore, industrial relations on the site were far from exemplary: the contractors seemed to have

105. Ibid.

little idea of constructive labour relations and had difficulty in controlling the work-force. In October 1950, the carpenters went on strike because they wished to carry out all the work on the amusement booths and were no longer willing to honour an interim agreement to share the work on a fifty-fifty basis with the steel workers.[106] When the men were not striking, they adopted a work-to-rule attitude. The lack of productivity was reported to the Minister of Works, Dr Richard Stokes, in a letter from Lord Hardwick:

> I spent over an hour walking around and one thing that commanded my attention was the unpleasant fact that Dowsett's men were not attempting to do a modicum of work. There appeared to be no supervision whatsoever except on the site of the model railway track where I saw a foreman (for the first time) who made a feeble attempt to suggest to one of the men that he might do some work; the individual who was requested so mildly to do something which he evidently considered to be outside his range of desire, simply threw his spade down and walked off the site; the rest of the gang merely smirked and stood around doing nothing - the foreman took no action whatsoever. I can safely say that all the gangs I saw on the grounds, consisting of well over one hundred men, together did not put in a man hour's work during the time I was on the ground.[107]

On 24 October 1950, Dowsetts registered official complaints with the Board of the Company demanding reimbursement for the uneconomical manner in which they had been forced to operate, due entirely to conditions beyond their control, such as the availability of the site, the inclement weather, and the lack of plans and layout drawings by the architect. They further added that in their estimation, conditions on the site would continue to be unfavourable for certain reasons which they listed: there would be shorter working days which would require temporary lighting for

106. Cab 124/1302, Lidderdale to Morrison, 23 October 1950.
107. Cab 124/1275, Lord Hardwick to Richard Stokes, 6 April 1950.

the operation of night gangs: inclement weather, the workforce would have to be increased in order to establish a float to enable the contractors to work in a proper sequence; additional supervisory staff would be required; and they anticipated further labour problems. They had, they said, taken part in a meeting on the morning of 24 October 1950 with the labour delegates, during which it was suggested that as the men were unable to work overtime due to the lack of suitable lighting facilities compensation should be paid to them. If they were not paid such compensation the labour force would probably leave the Battersea Park site to go to another one where overtime was in operation.[108]

On 1st November 1950, Dowsetts followed up their letter of 24th October. They requested an immediate decision by the Festival Gardens Company for suitable remuneration to be paid to them, as requested in their earlier letter. The basis upon which this additional payment should be made was, they said, either by a percentage on schedule rates or by a valuation of each building, which would be made by them in light of their knowledge of the cost of material and labour as well as the appropriate sub-contractors' charges against each building where they could be reasonably assessed.[109] The Company replied immediately stating that it had hoped to be able to put Dowsetts requests before the Finance and General Purposes Committee which was to have met on 2 November 1950, but which had been postponed until 9 November. In the meantime the

108. Cab 124/1279, S.Crawshawe (Contract Manager, Dowsetts) to Festival Gardens Ltd, 24 October 1950.
109. Cab 124/1279, S.Crawshawe to Festival Gardens Ltd, 1 November 1950.

Secretary of the Board, F.A. Ricketts, who was writing in the letter on the Company's behalf said:

> Subject to the formal confirmation of my Board, you are authorised to work on the assumption that any reasonable extra costs incurred by you through conditions outside your control, but designed to promote and accelerate the authorised work in connection with our whole project at Battersea Park will be recognised by my Company, subject to suitable safeguards and certification. The method of assessment of such extra charges remains a matter between yourselves and the Company's Quantity Surveyors Messrs C.E. Ball and Partners; In these circumstances, it is felt that so far as is practicable each items or category (as the case may be) of extra cost should be certified by the Quantity Surveyors through the Chief Architects, and without such prior authorisation my Company would not feel able to accept the Addition. [110]

On 8th November 1950, a meeting took place at which Leonard Crainford, the Managing Director of the Company, was present; also in attendance were G.W.Ball and C.F.Smith of Messrs. Ball and Partners, the Quanitity Surveyors for the Company; Mr Higgins, the Technical Controller; Howard Lobb, the Chairman of the Architectural Council, and P.O'Hara, the General Manager of the Festival Gardens Company. At this anxious meeting, of which no record was kept, it was decided that special steps would have to be taken to speed up the process of work on the site. It was therefore decided to meet any consequential increase in the contractors cost. Mr Ball suggested that in view of the contractors complaints as to delays to which he had been subjected, it might be necessary to change the nature of the contract to a 'cost-plus' basis. This idea was initially met with disapproval by both Howard Lobb and Higgins, on the grounds that the Festival Office would not approve of such a contract. During the course of this meeting,

110. Cab 124/1279, Ricketts to Dowsetts, 1 November 1950.

however, all the participants agreed that there was little alternative to a 'cost-plus' contract and the decision was taken to change the terms accordingly.[111]

On 8th December 1950, Mr Crainford wrote to the contractors:

> With further reference to the letters exchanged between this Company and yourselves on November 1st, my Board has now confirmed the payment to you of additional costs occasioned by:
>
> 1. Difficulties outside your control in carrying out this contract.
>
> 2. Approved action taken outside the provisions of the contract to accelerate work.
>
> My Board agree with you that the competent authority to decide and assess the necessary additions to the Contract is the appointed firm of Quantity Surveyors, Messrs. Ball and Partners, and as suggested in your letter is prepared to leave the matter entirely in their hands to arrive at a fair settlement. [112]

The Chairman, Sir Henry French, was not present at the meeting of 8 November 1950, nor were he and the other Board members aware, with the exception of Mr Crainford, that a letter making new arrangements had been sent to the contractors, and although it did not necessarily alter the terms of the original contract to that of a 'cost-plus' basis, the contractor and the Quantity Surveyor regarded the letter as virtually doing so, as had been agreed at the meeting of 8 November 1950.[113]

Dowsetts continued work on the site with the knowledge that any cost therefore incurred by them in the prevailing difficult and unpredictable labour conditions would be met by the desperate

111. Documents relating to the Festival Gardens Limited: (1951; Cmnd. 8277) para 9.
112. Cab 124/1279, Crainford to Dowsetts, 8 December 1950.
113. Cmnd. 8277, para 10.

officials of the Festival Gardens Company Limited. By 15 March 1951, however, the whole Board realised that there had been a grave misunderstanding resulting from their letter of December 1950. It had not been their intention to change the terms of contract but they came to the conclusion that as the contractor had been working on this basis and, moreover, as the work on the site was of primary importance, there was little alternative to officially confirming the new terms of contract.

Accordingly, on 23 March 1951, Leonard Crainford, the Company's Managing Director, sent the following letter to the contractors:

> My board considered at the meeting yesterday, the contractors position with regard to the construction work at the Festival Pleasure Gardens in Battersea Park. On the advice of its professional advisers, the Board accepts the fact that the amount to be paid to the main contractors, Messrs. Dowsett Engineering Construction Limited, will be the total cost approved and certified as necessary by yourselves, on the valuation made by Messrs Ball and Partners, the Quantity Surveyors, with the addition of a fixed sum of £51,000 to cover all overheads and profit until completion and you are now authorised to issue certificates on this basis. [114]

By the end of March 1951, by which time the Lord President had become aware of the financial problems at the Gardens, the contractors had presented the Board with a total bill which had risen markedly from its original estimated tender of £524,370 of March 1950, to £1.5 million which included the provision of the fixed fee of £57,000 for overhead expenses and profit of the main contractor. The Board was warned that the figure of £1.5 million was not fixed and it would be subject to any further delays or rises

114. Cab 124/1278, Crainford to Dowsetts, 23 March 1951.

in material and labour costs experienced by the contractor.[115]

The earliest notification the Government received of the problems at Battersea Park came, as has been noted earlier, in a letter on 18 December 1950 to the Lord President from Sir Henry French, the Company's Chairman. In his letter Sir Henry explained that in November 1950 an estimate presented to the Board had risen, to the great dismay of all the Directors and senior Officers of the Company, from £1.1 million in March 1950, to a total of £1,624 million. The anticipated revenue was £1,265 million, based on an average attendance of forty thousand per day, seven days a week, and a resultant estimated deficient of £359,000. The Board has, he said, investigated every possible way of reducing expenditure, without much success, and were now convinced that it had become necessary to incur the extra expenditure in order to provide the Pleasure Gardens in time for 1951. Any reduction in the proposed expenditure on the Gardens would, he said, result in a greatly diminished revenue and an increase in loss. He went on to say:

> Emergency measures dictated by the final time factor have made it impossible to observe the normal process of economy planning and rendered it imperative to employ a 'blitz' strategy. It is, indeed, true to say that throughout the short period of the Company's existence, events have been ahead of the Board and its Officers. We have been faced by the stark fact that, since the primary estimates were prepared prices of labour and raw materials have been on continuously ascending scale. Moreover the belated start compelled us to employ a variety of designers and architects, instead of relying on a small number wholly employed as members of our staff, with an inevitable increase of fees and expenses.[116]

He went on to give further reasons as to why the cost of the

115. Cmnd. 8277, para 2.
116. Cab 124/1274, French to Morrison, 18 December 1950.

Gardens had risen so markedly. None of the Directors had, he said, contemplated that the difference would be so large between the cost of providing cafes and other catering facilities, and that of the revenue likely to be obtained by the Company from our catering contracts. He said that there were two major reasons for this, the facts were that the cost of the catering units was out of all proportion to their short term purpose, and the revenue returns of these facilities was much lower than initially anticipated. It was he said:

> Always obvious that the cost of the building and services required for the feeding of visitors to the Gardens could not be recovered in a six months run - but the gap has proved much larger than anticipated.

The financial problems were further compounded by the fact that the Board had introduced certain indispensable features at the Company's cost for which they had not succeeded in finding sponsors. He said that the main reason for this disappointment was the change in the general world situation and other factors beyond the Board's control: for example, a national newspaper which had been enthusiastic about three essential features suddenly refused to give them any further consideration because of the shortage of newsprint. Ultimately, his conclusion of the poor state of affairs was that:

> When it was decided to limit the Gardens to the summer of 1951, the whole scheme which was originally intended to have a life of five - seven years should have been scrapped and a revised plan involving a much lesser capital outlay should have been prepared. Whether such a modified plan would have been a credit to the Festival of Britain is doubtful, but one thing is certain, that by the time this Company was set up, such a scheme could not have been devised , approved by the Government and carried into effect by May 1951.

Sir Henry concluded his letter by stating that it was with the

utmost regret that he had to send such a statement to the Lord President which he realised would cause him much disappointment and anxiety which he stressed that the Directors shared acutely. Nevertheless he said, "we trust that you will see your way to authorise the necessary financial provision to be made in future estimates for the Festival Office"[117]. Sir Henry's final sentiments about how Morrison would feel when he received his letter were not underestimated - the Lord President was not only alarmed, he was furious. He replied to Sir Henry in no uncertain terms that he "would not be prepared to seek any increase in the loan authority given for the Festival Pleasure Gardens." He added that he was willing to authorise financial provision to be made in the 1951-52 estimates for the Festival Office within the limits of the existing loan authorisation, and to approve the use of revenue to meet outgoings in the budget which the Board submitted. He concluded his letter by stating:

> While the increase in the expected loss on the Festival Pleasure Gardens on the current basis of operation has aggravated my difficulties in keeping within the £9 million net limit for Festival expenditure as a whole, I am not prepared to contemplate exceeding that figure on the final return of the Festival and I hope that your Board and Officers will use the utmost ingenuity to show some further increase in revenue in mitigation of the very heavy increase in expenditure. [118]

So disquieted were the Lord President and his staff that in early January 1951, before the Lord President replied to Sir Henry French's letter, Nicholson took the unusual step of demanding on behalf of the Lord President a formal assurance from the Festival

117. Ibid.
118. Cab 124/1274, Morrison to French, 11 January 1951.

Gardens Company that no more financial assistance would be required from the Government.[119] The Board sent the following reply on 1st January 1951 to the office of the Lord President:

> I understand from Mr Campbell that the Lord President desires to have an assurance in writing that the Company would be able to fulfill its programme without asking for any increase in the loan.
> I am happy to confirm that this is indeed the considered opinion of the Officers of the Company. [120]

On 3 January 1951 Nicholson wrote to Leonard Crainford to say that he would advise the Lord President that he could rely on the Company existing on the loans already authorised without requesting any additional finance.[121] In his letter of 11 January 1951, Nicholson further advised the Lord President to ask the Board through Sir Henry to appoint a Finance Officer to take charge of the Company's financial management. The Company, desiring to retain its autonomy, were slow to take the Lord President's suggestion, though they had decided to appoint a Finance Officer to take charge of the Company's financial management at the Company's inception on 16 December 1949. However, on 9 February 1951, the Company informed the Lord President that they had secured the services of a seasoned Finance Officer, E.Sawers, a Civil Servant who had been the Director of Navy accounts at the Admiralty, recommended to the Company by the Treasury.[122]

The Lord President informed Sir Henry on 19 February that he was pleased with the appointment of Sawers who could now take charge of the Company's financial situation. This appointment is, he said:

> all the more desirable since I anticipate considerable

119. Cab 124/1274, Memo by Nicholson to Stokes, 5 April 1951.
120. Cab 124/1274, Crainford to Nicholson, 1 January 1951.
121. Ibid. Nicholson to Crainford, 3 January 1951.
122. Ibid. French to Morrison, 9 February 1951.

criticism when the increased prospective loss on the Festival Pleasure Gardens is made public and it is absolutely vital both from your point of view and mine that there should be no reasonable ground for charges of waste or extravagance which are only too easily brought in such conditions. Having seen the pleasant and profitable examples of this kind of enterprise in Scandinavia I am convinced that the Gardens can be a financial as well as a social success and I would like to see everyone concerned imbued with the determination to make them so.[123]

On 8th March 1951, a meeting was held at which Sir Henry French, Crainford, Sawers, Sendall, Barry, Campbell and Nicholson were present. Nicholson explained to the gathered members of the Company and the Festival Office that the Lord President "was extremely disturbed at the apparent tendency of expenditure to run away in excess of the estimates and of the great difficulty he would have in defending the Company if some overt and drastic steps were not taken to stop the rot".

Sir Henry proceeded to explain at great length the troubles the Company had had over the past year which arose from a late start, bad weather, loss of morale due to Parliamentary and press criticism, as well as other factors which had delayed the work and thereby increased the costs. He further went on to state that he was of the opinion that the contractors had used far more manpower than was necessary or essential but as they would be finishing their work by 31 March 1951, there could be no substantial cut in manpower (and therefore costs) without possibly creating ill feelings and thereby further jeopardising the work on the site. Sir Henry also added that he was of the opinion that the contractors and the Quantity Surveyors were tending to put in and pass bills on the

123. Cab 124/1274, Morrison to French, 19 February 1951.

basis of whatever the work had cost rather than on the basis of schedule prices to which the contractors were entitled. This practice in some cases causes excesses by as much as sixty per cent. Although he recognised that it was important that the contractors were not upset or angered, thus delaying their departure from the site by the end of March 1951, he intended to warn them that expenditure without proper authority and in excess of sums to which they were entitled could not be accepted by the company as binding. Furthermore, he proposed to speak very sternly to the Quantity Surveyors who, although employed by the Company, seemed not to be exercising sufficiently strict control.[124]

It was further revealed at this meeting that Sir Henry had not yet resolved the matter of how the Company would keep afloat until the revenue from the Gardens came in. The question was whether or not the Gardens could survive without borrowing additional monies from the Government and the LCC. The Company's Finance Committee were examining this issue but it was thought, even at this early stage, that some further borrowing facilities would have to be arranged. Nicholson responded to these points by stating that he did not think that the Lord President would entertain the idea of approaching the Chancellor for extra funds or seeking a supplementary estimate, and that some way must, therefore be found to carry on over the interim period without asking for more public money. If the Company could not function without resorting to borrowing additional funds then, Nicholson said, the Lord President

124. Cab 124/1274, Nicholson to Morrison, Note for the Record., 8 March 1951.

would be bound to ask for an estimate which showed explicitly why and how the Company needed additional funds. The Lord President, he concluded, wished it to be known to the members that while he was very anxious to see the Pleasure Gardens successfully launched, the financial trend of the Company was highly embarrassing to him especially in view of the country's economic problems and it should be clear to all concerned that economy was an overriding consideration.[125]

On 9th March 1951, Nicholson sent a memorandum to the Lord President stating that the Finance Committee of the Festival Gardens had met with the Quantity Surveyors and "the worst fears about the worsening financial situation were exceeded." It emerged at this meeting that the total expenditure on the Gardens could well be at least £2.1 million and that the financial resources of the Company would not only carry them through until May 1951, they would not take them much further than one more week. To compound matters, Sir Henry had conveyed the situation to the Public Accounts Committee on 27 February 1951, and Nicholson said that rumours were circulating to the effect that £2 million had already been spent on the Gardens. He said he had informed the Treasury "that trouble was afoot" and, at a meeting held with the Board on the afternoon of 9 March 1951, he was told that in view of all the assurances the Board had given to the contractors, any chance or hope of disputing the vast additional figures would have to be abandoned. The Treasury had, he said, been very prompt and helpful in the crisis and were putting forward some initiatives upon which to act: they

125. Ibid.

suggested that an independent enquiry should be carried out by Chartered Accountants to examine the Company's financial situation; and secondly, that Parliament, who had authorised the original loan to the Company, had to be told of the financial difficulties. Nicholson also added that it was the opinion both of himself and Sir Wilfred Eady of the Treasury that when Parliament was told of the of the problems at the Gardens, the Lord President would be open to the charge of having failed to disclose to the House the full extent of the additional losses of which he ought to have been aware. He further added that:

> While it is a fact that the Chairman of the Festival Gardens Limited has not up to this moment felt in a position to supply you with any estimate to supercede the £1.625 million, he has now put you in an impossible position by quoting the Public Accounts Committee very much higher figures, which, although probably not accurate, are evidently much nearer to the true order of magnitude in the light of yesterday's meeting with the Quantity Surveyors.[126]

Nicholson's advice to the Lord President was that he ought to have a Private Member's Question, or issue in some alternative form an early statement making it clear that the higher figures given by Sir Henry to the Public Accounts Committee must be taken as representing more clearly the correct level of expenditure than the figure of £1.625 million that the Lord President gave the House on 6 March 1951. Further, the Treasury were exploring the possibility of advancing the sum of £50,000 (which was not due to be paid to the Company until April 1951) so that the Company could be kept afloat long enough to enable it to get a loan from the bank. Nicholson concluded his memorandum to Morrison by asking him if he wished any

126. Cab 124/1274, Nicholson to the Lord President, 9 March 1951.

steps to be taken towards preparing a Private Members Question, and also informing him that Sir Henry was writing to him to say what had occurred at the Public Accounts Committee meeting. The Lord President's response to the memo was one of exasperation. He wrote that he was quite simply 'fed-up' and that he would be available after the Cabinet Meeting for further discussion on the subject.[127]

On 9 March 1951 the Lord President received Sir Henry's account of the meeting with the PAC. He explained that on the morning of 8 March 1951, Gerald Barry was due to attend a second meeting with the PAC (his first meeting had taken place on 27 February 1951 when Sir Henry was present). This meeting was held by the Finance Committee of the Festival Gardens at which three of the Company's Quantity Surveyors was present. In Sir Henry's words this meeting had,

> brought home to members of the Board, including myself, two very disturbing and unacceptable facts: first, that the total expenditure of the Company as set out in our November-December estimate is undoubtedly going to be exceeded (I cannot say at present by how much), and secondly, that whereas we had previously been confident that we could meet all our expenditure previous to the opening of the Gardens on the £770,000 loan plus revenue already secured, it was now apparent that owing to increased expenditure our expectations were not going to be fulfilled.[128]

Sir Henry explained that these facts were not available at the first meeting of the PAC on 27 February 1951 at which he was present, thus, when he faced the Committee for a second time on 8 March 1951 and was questioned by Captain Waterhouse, the Committee's Chairman, who asked whether the figure of £1.625 million

127. Ibid. Morrison's comments were written on the top if this document and dated 11 March 1951.
128. Cab 124/1274, French to Morrison, 9 March 1951.

expenditure (as given to the House by the Lord President on 6 March 1951) was the final figure. Sir Henry wrote, "Obviously I could not say that it was", and this led, he said, "to further questions and eventually, much against my wishes, I was driven to admitting that the situation had changed even since you gave your reply two days before". He further added that he had emphatically defended the Lord President against the charge that he had misled the House with his reply of 6 March 1951, and when he was asked if he knew of the contents of the Lord President's reply of the 6 March, to which he replied that he did, but that at the time, he could not amend it nor was he in a position to get figures other than those given by the Lord President. He concluded by stating:

> My general impression is that although the beginning of my evidence was extremely difficult and made me conscious all the time of how embarrassing it might prove to you, the last half of the time when I was in the witness chair brought about a considerable change. Then the matter was brought into considerable perspective and there was a reasonable measure of understanding of the difficulties of our position on the appointed date and the impracticability of making in advance reliable estimates of expenditure seeing that overtime and other factors have been quite unpredictable. [129]

On 12 March 1951, Sir Henry wrote another more desperate letter to the Lord President stating that since his letter of 9 March 1951, detailed estimates had been sent to the Treasury who, earlier had intervened to attempt to sort out the Company's difficulties. The Company had not only supplied the Treasury with estimates but with particulars of the additional loan which they would require in order to complete the construction and preparations to enable the Gardens to open on 3 May 1951. Sir Henry said of

129. Ibid.

these estimates, "Yet again, I regret to say that both these estimates are greatly in excess of anything that I had in mind when giving evidence to the PAC on 8 March 1951". So distressed was he by the present state of affairs that, at an emergency meeting on 15 March 1951, he proposed, subject to the Lord President's approval, to ask the Board (who would no doubt agree) to appoint some person or firm, whose appointment would inspire the general confidence that the Festival Gardens so clearly lacked, to look into the Company's financial and accounting arrangements and to take over control of all the Company's future financial commitments. The selection of the person or firm to oversee the Company's financial arrangements, as well as the terms of reference by which they would operate, could, he added, be discussed and approved by the Treasury and the Lord President's office. However, although the Treasury and the Lord President's office could discuss the selection of a suitable person or firm, Sir Henry felt that their appointment should be made by the Board of Directors of the Company.[130]

On 14 March 1951, Nicholson replied to Sir Henry on behalf of Morrison (now Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) to say that the Foreign Secretary agreed with him that there was a need to take some action to restore public confidence in the future financial arrangements of the Gardens and that he hoped the Board would accept Sir Henry's recommendations. It was of course essential, Nicholson concluded, that the Treasury should be consulted regarding any appointment the Board made and that any arrangements arrived at would be acceptable to them.[131]

130. Cab 124/1274, French to Morrison, 12 March 1951.
131. Ibid. Nicholson to French, 14 March 1951.

On 16th March 1951, Sir Henry wrote to Nicholson to say that the Board had accepted his proposal for a firm to be appointed to sort out the Company's problems, but that some members of the Board felt it to be essential that the responsibility for financial decisions should rest with the Board. He said that this seemed to be necessary and he was sure this request would meet with the approval of both Morrison and the Treasury. (This was indeed a ridiculous request from a Board that had shown themselves completely incapable of handling the Company's finances.) Sir Henry concluded his letter by saying that the firm or person to be attached to the Board should be given the role of Financial Secretary, as the Company could not accept the title that was being considered, namely that of Executive Vice-Chairman.[132]

On 29 March 1951 the firm of Moores, Carson and Watson were appointed to this role by the Board of the Festival Gardens Company, with the full support and approval of the Lord President's Office and the Treasury. The firm's terms of reference were:

> To investigate and report on the circumstances which have caused the financial commitments of the Festival Gardens Limited to be greatly in excess of the amount which it was estimated would be sufficient in December last.[133]

The firm's Interim Report was presented to the Company on 17 April 1951, and one of its preliminary suggestions was that a full inspection of the contractors' books and records should be undertaken, as soon as possible, by an independent firm of Chartered Accountants to verify how, and if, the contract signed with the

132. Ibid. French to Nicholson, 16 March 1951.
133. Cab 124/1278, H.N. Butler of Moores, Carson and Watson to the Directors of the Festival Gardens Limited, 16 April 1986.

Company was on a 'cost-plus' basis and to investigate the allegations of fraud and inefficiency.[135] In this connection, on 23 April 1951, taking up Butler's suggestion, the Board appointed the firms of Peat, Marwick and Mitchell, whose terms of reference were:

> To conduct a full inspection of the contractors' books and records in accordance with the accepted practice of 'cost-plus' contracts; to investigate the allegations of fraud and inefficiency; to examine all other matters relative to the cost of the project of the Festival Gardens as may be necessary. To report thereon to the Chairman and Directors of the Company.[136]

The final reports of these firms formed the main body of the Government's White Paper on the Festival Garden's Company Limited which was presented to Parliament on 25 June 1951. The two reports came to the same conclusion: the Company's financial predicament was not so much the fault of the contractors, as of the Board of Directors who had failed to keep a proper grip on project expenditure. Similar opinions were expressed with extreme candour by Sir Wilfred Eady of the Treasury and by Richard Stokes (formerly the Minister of Works, who was appointed Lord Privy Seal on 26 April 1951). After reading the Interim Report of Moores, Carson and Watson, Sir Wilfred Eady said in a memorandum to Stokes that the report confirmed an important observation which he had made to the Lord Privy Seal from the outset, on the;

> extraordinary composition of a Board of a private company which purports to carry out business with public money. The Board more closely resembles an interdepartmental committee than a business concern. Apart from its diversity, its vagueness as to allocation of responsibility and the absence

134. Ibid. Interim Report of Moores, Carson and Watson, 16 April 1951.
135. Cmnd. 8277, para 1.

> of anyone with a knowledge of building construction contracts, etc. it is most unusual to find officials as Directors of a private company. I refer to Barry, Campbell, Cooke and Sendall. Where the Treasury or Board of Trade advance loans to industrial concerns, e.g. in development areas, it is usual for the Treasury to appoint some independent person as a nominated director on the Board to look after the taxpayers interest. In this case no single person was appointed, but for some reason the Board included members of the staff of the Festival Office.[136]

Putting forward his views in the most blunt language, Richard Stokes wrote to Herbert Morrison asking how frank he should be with Parliament concerning this situation:

> (1) Fundamentally the extra cost rose from the sheer incompetence on the part of those who should have known better.
>
> (2) I lay the blame at the door of the Festival Office who appointed the Board of Directors to run the Festival Gardens Limited but failed to think it necessary to find a suitable Managing Director.
>
> (3) On top of that the Chairman, in my opinion, from my examination of the accounts had not a clue as to what he was doing.
>
> (4) In consequence, no real check was kept of actual expenditure against estimates and on top of it all, the contract was let to a contractor who was quite incapable of carrying out the work and who had no experience in handling the large and varied workforce.
>
> (5) What is worse, it was specifically stated in the Minutes that certain of the big contractors should be excluded because they were too large and that two contractors engaged on the South Bank should not be invited to quote because they would be too busy. In point of fact, had either of the contractors on the South Bank been chosen, it would have given them the flexibility, being next door to the South Bank, to help them out on the South Bank project.

136. Cab 124/1278, Eady to Stokes, 19 April 1951.

(6) When the Managing Director was appointed he was appointed merely because they could not find anybody else and the poor fellow did not want to do it. The fact that he had left his previous job under a cloud was not even known to the Festival authorities because they did not check up and get proper references before they appointed him.

(7) The Communist Party were dead set to exploit every possible grievance on the site. This would never have happened had a competent contractor been in charge. The contractor had not the remotest notion of how to handle a large, varied and poor quality workforce.

(8) As far as I can see, the Officers of the Festival Gardens Limited took very little interest in what was actually happening at the site, except on paper. I am prepared to believe that they were completely unaware of what was happening on the ground except that everybody was being as difficult as possible.

(9) But there is no doubt whatever, that the workers slacked and allowed themselves to be exploited. On the other hand there must have been a large number of first-class men there who did a very good job of work despite the opposition of their colleagues.

(10) All sorts of points have been made as to why the cost should have gone up, including the weather, but in point of fact they could have had worse weather. Provided, as they were, with protective clothing, the men had really little to grouse about, merely because the weather was wet. Had it been freezing the situation could have been different for it is impossible to carry out excavating work or concreting under cold weather conditions but the weather was mild throughout.[137]

Despite the veracity of Stokes' comments, he neglected to add the plain fact that the Government were responsible for vetting the soundness of the scheme in the first place and for choosing an experienced board of directors. It can be argued that the Government failed in both respects.

The comments circulating privately about the Festival Gardens fiasco were made public, with more balance, in the White Paper.

137. Cab 124/1278, Stokes to Morrison, 31 May 1951.

Butler, of Moores, Carson and Watson, gave the following reasons for the Company's strained financial position:

A. The failure to attain a more advanced stage of planning during the winter of 1949-50 and to get the foundation work done in the summer of 1950.

B. The lack of an expert building contractor on the Board with specific responsibility for placing and supervising the construction of the contract.

C. The lack of an expert accountant on the Board with specific responsibility for planning and supervising the books and financial records.

D. The general failure to delegate responsibility for the Company's affairs.

E. The lack of a suitable Managing Director to co-ordinate the various aspects of the work, to seek and obtain policy decisions in good time and, above all, to see that when they were obtained they were carried out quickly and efficiently.

F. The alleged change in the basis of the contract which makes it necessary to provide for the possibility that all excess expenditure may be chargeable to the Company.

G. The exceptionally heavy rainfall and the shortage of certain materials which were expensive during the winter of 1950/51.

H. The exceptionally low labour output which has resulted from adverse working conditions, the excessively rapid expansion of the labour force and the desire to avoid strikes. In this connection, I have noted that there is a general concensus of opinion that certain influences have definitely sought to foment discontent on the site.

In his report, Butler recommended that further attention should be given to the present status of the contract and the changes made resulting in a move to 'cost-plus' from a fixed-price basis. He further recommended, as in his Interim Report, that an independent firms of accountants should check the contractors' books in the light of the charges of inefficiency and fraud, and he also suggested that a small management committee should be set up, with its members being delegated definite responsibilities for the

various aspects of the Company's business.[138]

The report of Peat, Marwick and Mitchell, the second firm of Chartered Accountants recommended by Moores, Carson and Watson, examined and exposed the causes of some of the problems of the Festival Gardens Company. Their report explained that the tenders the Board received were obtained under abnormal circumstances, in that the Architects and the Quantity Surveyors had to produce a sketch plan and a Bill of Quantities, based upon this plan, within three weeks of their appointment which, the report stated, inevitably represented to a large degree what could only be described as intelligent guesswork. As the Quantity Surveyor had no detailed or accurate information upon which to determine, with any precision, the quantities of work of varying types required, the contractor providing evidence of the total cost.[139] On the matter of the alleged change in the terms of the contract, the Company's Auditors said that this alteration was not to a 'cost--plus' in the ordinary sense of the term, but to that of 'cost', plus a fixed fee.

This fixed fee was determined in negotiation with the contractor who originally suggested a figure of £100,000, but ultimately settled for £57,000.[140] The firm attributed the rise in costs to the uneconomic working of the contractor, adding, however, that conditions leading to this were beyond the contractors' control and that the expense which occurred was a

138. Cmnd. 8277, paras 2-3.
139. Ibid., para. 6.
140. Cab 124/1278, F.W. Charles of Peat Marwick Mitchell and Company to Richard Stokes, 21 June 1951.

result of the Company refusing to grant an extension of time for the completion of the contract. The Auditors concluded their report by stating:

A. No valid comparison can be drawn between the original tender of £524,370 and the probable estimated cost of £1.5 million, as the extent of the work has been greatly increased, thus rendering direct comparison irrelevant.

B. The authority for extensions and alterations in the work to be carried out was retained by the Company and was exercised through its Advisory Panel of designers, headed by the Chief Designer, Mr James Gardner. The respopnsibilities for these increases must rest with the Company.

C. The increase in costs attributable to uneconomic working by the contractor is at least partially attributable to conditions beyond his control which we have described in an earlier part of this report and which were created, primarily, by the fact that no extension of time for the completion of the contract could be granted. It also appears, however, that expense has been incurred by the contractor, arising out of an apparent lack of control and organisation at a time when the volume of work to be completed in a specified time was suddenly expanded by reason of earlier delays.

D. The increase in the volume of work and consequently of costs, is also partially attributable to a lack of success in obtaining sponsors for certain buildings which were not included in the original estimates but which, in event, had to be erected by the contractor as a charge on the Company.

E. We have seen no evidence to suggest that the managements of any of the contracting firms or of the professional firms engaged on the contract have knowingly been party to any irregularities which may have taken place at a lower level.

They further added that:

We think it apparent from the foregoing survey that the fundamental cause of the inflation in the costs of the Festival Gardens project has been its initial delays for which the Company and its management must accept responsibility, even if it was unavoidable. The subsequent effort in unfavourable weather conditions to make good lost time has been productive of a material increase in costs, some part of

which may be attributable to inadequate control. [141]

The Board never completely happy with the enforced investigations into their Company's finances, sought the opportunity to reply to the criticism of the firms and asked that their explanation be published in the White Paper.

They presented feeble excuses for the financial problems at the Gardens and blamed the delay, cited by the two firms of Chartered Accountants, on the fact that they, as a Board, were not constituted until 25 November 1949. They further added:

> When we commenced our work, plans and designs were in outline only and consisted of some broad general sketched plans of suggested layout of the Gardens and some rough sketched designs of certain features which it was proposed to include. Certain important alternatives were suggested to the Board and negotiations took place with a view to engaging the service of expert designers to take over responsibility for a large section of the work. These negotiations broke down and on the 12 January, Mr James Gardner was entrusted with the full responsibility of the preparation of the overall layout of the Gardens as a whole. It will be appreciated that certain fundamental work, such as the laying of mains and services, could not be undertaken until the general layout had been approved and the location of the buildings requiring those services had been, at any rate, approximately fixed. A contributory cause of the delay was that we considered it

141. Cmnd.8277, paras. 24-27. The fourth point in Marwick's report was confirmed earlier by Nicholson, in a memorandum to Richard Stokes to explain how some problems in the Gardens arose. He said that the original scheme provided for a number of very simple canvas and other light temporary structures, appropriate for operation during a single season and their subsequent removal. At some stage, however, and by some unexplained process, a whole number of elaborate buildings of a permanent and semi-permanent character evolved out of these cheap and simple prototypes. If, Nicholson concluded, the specifications that were adopted, had been submitted in the first place, it would have been obvious that the cost was bound to be higher than the authorised estimate. Cab 124/1274, Nicholson to Stokes, 27 March 1951.

> desirable that the design and layout of the catering buildings should meet the requirements of the catering concessionaires, with whom negotiations were more prolonged than we could have foreseen. The fact, therefore, that the site became available to the contractors in sections did not, of itself, result in any material hold-up in operations. [142]

With regard to Messrs. Carson and Watson's criticisms of the composition of the Board, the Directors stated that being appointed with the approval of the Festival Council, the Lord President's Office and the LCC, they had nothing to do with the directorial structure of the Company which did not dictate that each member be assigned special functions, as the Report suggested. Furthermore, they did not think it necessary, even if the constitutional arrangements of the Company had permitted it, to nominate any one, or more, of their number to take individual responsibility for the work of construction, operation of finances etc.[143] Acknowledging his unsuitability for the position of Managing Director, Leonard Crainford said that his colleagues knew at the time of his appointment that he had "no experience at all in the conducting of a building and construction Contract and had little financial experience. All his experience had been in the theatrical field where the contracts drawn up and arranged were a great deal simpler."[144] The Directors said of this appointment that due to the temporary nature of the project, they were unable to find a candidate whose qualifications and experience measured up to the standards they felt were desirable. The Board had appointed a Deputy General Manager on 13 December 1949 and claimed that,

142. Cmnd.8277, Para.2.
143. Ibid., Para.6.
144. Cab 124/1278, Crainford to Joseph, 20 April 1951.

although every possible effort was made, no suitable person outside the Festival Organisation could be found and, therefore, in June 1950, they appointed Leonard Crainford.[145] A man whom Nicholson had warned the Festival Office "was not up to the more responsible duties he was assuming". Nicholson said, "it has always been my view that Mr Crainford can be quite helpful in a limited sphere, but is not up to any post of major responsibility".[146] On the subject of Dowsetts Construction and the contract, the Board confirmed the fact that not only had they chosen Dowsetts because they had produced the lowest tender, but moreover, they felt entitled to assume that this tender was based upon a full understanding, by the tenderer, of the measured quantities which they believed were based on a reasonably accurate assessment. (It appeared that, regarding the contract, the Board as a whole were completely inept). Leonard Crainford claimed that at the meeting of 8 November when the initial change in the terms of contract was discussed, no definite agreement about the contract was discussed, no definite agreement about the contract was reached, nor could any authority or instructions have been given at this meeting which would have led to the contractors being informed of the contract being changed to that of a 'cost-plus' nature. Moreover, he regarded the meeting of 8 November of such little significance that he did not view it necessary to report it to the Finances and General Purposes Committee of the Company.[147]

The Directors admitted to sending a letter in November 1950,

145. Cmnd. 8277, para.8.
146. Cab. 124/1275, Nicholson to Stokes, 5 April 1951.
147. Cmnd. 8277, para.15.

on the advice of their financial advisors, accepting liability for extra costs for which they provided the sum of £80,000 recommended by their Quantity Surveyors. The Company said that they did not perceive that this sum would involve the Company in expenditure heavier than that for which contingency provision had been made in their November estimates. They said that neither they themselves nor their Finance Officers knew of the alleged change of contract in November but, after consulting their financial advisors and extensive discussion with both the Quantity Surveyor and the contractors, there had been little alternative but to accept the situation, and the letter of 23 March 1951 had been sent confirming the change of contract to that of a 'cost-plus nature'.[148]

The Government's White Paper tactfully exposed the reasons why the financial problems occurred. Amongst Morrison and his former staff, and the Auditors and Treasury Officials, there was an unusual unanimity of opinion as to who was responsible for the chaos. Sir Henry French, whom Nicholson had recommended for the job of Chairman, wanted to resign as early as 12 March 1951, but his resignation was refused on the advice of Sir Wilfred Eady of the Treasury, who felt that "French should stay on and face the matter out, making sure that the whole situation was cleaned up".[149]

By 2 April 1951, however, it had become clear that Sir Henry was quite incapable of this and his resignation was duly accepted. Leonard Crainford was forced to resign before the White Paper was published, and Major Leslie Joseph, the Chairman of the National

148. Ibid., paras. 16 & 22.
149. Cab 124/1274, Eady to Nicholson, 13 March 1951.

Amusements Council, was appointed to the post of Managing Director and Chairman of the Festival Gardens Company Limited, by Richard Stokes, in order to finish the job, with an additional loan of £1 million which was granted by Parliament.

The Festival had managed to survive the traumas of its financial resources being depleted. firstly by the necessity of the country's economic problems; secondly, by the politically-motivated claims of the LCC; and lastly, by the hugely embarrassing problems of the Pleasure Gardens. This survival was in no small was way due to the dedication of both the Lord President and Nicholson to the project. Their ability to compromise at the early stages of the financial arrangements, to manipulate when compromise was no longer feasible, and to be resolute and persistent when disorder and chaos threatened, had not only saved the Government from the embarrassing option of cancellation, but had given the organisers of the Festival a chance to present their version intact, of the future that awaited Britain and her people.

CHAPTER 5

"APPROACHING 1951" AND THE OPENING OF THE FESTIVAL OF BRITAIN

Financial matters resolved at last, the Festival Organisation turned their attention to implementing the required finishing touches before the opening of the Festival on 1 May 1951. One of their primary tasks at this stage was to ensure that the Festival was satisfactorily publicised. This job fell to Paul Wright, the Director of Publicity, and the Publicity Planning Group which was composed of representatives from the Central Office of Information (COI), the Board of Trade's Overseas Department, the Travel Association, and the Advertising Agents. With a budget of £408,500 the chief priority of the Publicity Planning Group was to sell the Festival both at home and overseas. Their brief was to attract the attention of the United States, North America, Europe and the important Commonwealth Countries (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Rhodesia, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon). The Festival Organisation and the Government had convinced both themselves and the people that 1951 was going to be a great dollar-earning year. They believed that the Festival would give a much needed boost to Britain's tourist industry by urging visitors to return to Britain on a regular basis and to encourage their friends to do so also.[1] It was so central to the Festival's success and impact that Britain should, as a nation, be perceived as having a glorious future that the Festival Office drew up a list of countries which they felt it necessary to court. The list was presented to the Foreign Office for its opinion and approval. Listed in order of importance, the Festival Office placed the Commonwealth Colonies, British Colonies and Protectorates first, closely followed by the United States and

1. COI, CL593, June 1949 - March 1951.

Canada. Then came the European countries (outside the Iron Curtain): France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Portugal and Spain, as well as their colonies; Luxembourg, the Irish Republic, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greece and Turkey. The last group included Central and South America, the Middle Eastern countries, the Far East and the Iron Curtain countries.[2] The Foreign Office made a few interesting alterations to the list which reflected the interest and concerns of foreign policy makers and advisors in the post-war era. They advised the Festival Office to add the newly created West Germany to their European section as part of their policy to treat West Germany as soon as possible on the same basis as the other European nations. They also asked for the inclusion of Austria who was shortly to sign a treaty which would entitle her to be treated as the other European nations.[3] With regard to the lowest priority group, the Foreign Office said that the Middle East should be courted with a healthy supply of advertising material. They warned the Festival Office, however, to be wary of dealing with Israel and that they considered any efforts made in the Iron Curtain countries to be a waste of time.[4]

The Publicity Planning Group made approaches to these countries as well as to the cities, towns and countries at home, through the usual media of film, magazines, radio, press, and leaflets. To assist the Publicity Department, the Festival Organisation selected the London Press Exchange, a large and experienced organisation with many contacts overseas, as Agents for

2. COI, FP2/9/1, February 1949 - October 1951.
3. Ibid. Publicity Planning Group meeting,14 October 1949.
4. COI, CL593, Paul Wright to Mr Briggs, 1 June 1949.

the Festival. Publicising the Festival was not however, an easy task because of its very nature and also because of the obligation facing the publicity planners in trying to sell the idea of the national character of the Festival both at home and overseas. The problem was that the Publicity Group was attempting to market a large number of products, "many of them appealing to different sections of opinion, with an appropriation that was barely adequate for one alone".[5] This meant that they either had to concentrate on the South Bank Exhibition and run the risk of underplaying the nationwide aspect of the Festival as a whole or, produce advertisements which, while being factually correct and fulfilling all their obligations, would probably be less effective from an advertising point of view. The publicity planners chose to adopt the latter approach but at the same time they managed to introduce some novel advertising techniques: there were two notable examples of this, one of which was a campaign in Europe and the other, was designed to cover the United States.[6] In conjunction with the Executive Committee, the publicity planners approached the London Transport Authority to organise the dispatching of four double-decker buses on a continental tour to promote advance publicity for the Festival in the form of a preview exhibition. Three of the buses were designed as publicity vehicles, while the fourth retained its original form as a London bus. In the autumn of

5. Work 25/3, Report by the Director of Public Relations, October 1951.
6. Ibid.

1950, this touring exhibition attracted the attention of some 171,000 people as it journeyed 4,000 miles through twenty-six cities in seven different countries. The policy adopted for America was described by the Director of Publicity as "the most startlingly single piece of advertising placed and could be described as a calculated risk which succeeded brilliantly". The Publicity Group had approached the Time/Life Magazine Company and persuaded them to place the Festival in one issue as a major feature, covering four pages of colour advertisements. Paul Wright, the Director of Publicity, said that the success of this Campaign:

> was due not only to the broad nature of the Life plan but also to the fact that by the policy adopted, that is of placing nearly all the appropriation into one splash in one magazine, the support of the vast and powerful organisation of Time-Life Inc was thereby enlisted with continuing repercussions favourable to the Festival throughout the world. [7]

Other forms of advertising included the press: in the overseas market 2,520 insertions were made in 386 newspapers in sixteen different languages, at the cost of £131,000: the Home market consisted of 1,616 insertions of 32 differing advertisements in 587 newspapers, thereby ensuring national coverage. Leaflets were also widely used: for the overseas market, 2,640,000 leaflets of five differing types were printed in seven languages (French, German, Portuguese, Spanish, Afrikaans, Dutch, and Italian), these were distributed to 105 countries throughout the world. In addition to this, 25,000 duplicated leaflets were also distributed world-wide. For the home market, 1,385,000 leaflets of five differing types were printed and distributed nationwide; 45,000

7. Ibid.

information leaflets were distributed to local Authorities; and over 2 million leaflets were produced by the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Committees for distribution by the Festival's Public Relations's Department. The Public Relations Department also distributed a further 750,000 leaflets produced by the Arts Council, which detailed the activities of the various Arts Festivals. The expenditure on leaflets to serve both the home and abroad advertising, totalled £32,400.[8] In addition to the leaflets, posters were also printed: the overseas share of the posters amounted to 35,000 which was composed of three different designs by Abraham Games. The design comprised a four-pointed compass surmounted by Britannia's head and the Festival flag with a simplified version of the Festival symbol printed in three different colour arrangements.[9] For home consumption, 294,000 posters were produced in thirteen different designs which included the three designs for foreign distribution. Two official information centres opened in London during the Festival period at the cost of £22,000, as well as a temporary centre which opened for a period of nine months, closing at the end of January 1951. A total of 760,000 enquiries were made to these three centres, by personal call, telephone and letter. In addition to this the Ocean Terminal Information Bureaux at Southampton dealt with over 50,000 passengers

8. Ibid.
9. Work 25/3, The Story of The Festival of Britain 1951.

disembarking from the Queens Liners and also the America.[10]

Despite the seemingly widespread Home Campaign, it is questionable, however, as to how successful it actually was. In an inquiry made for the Festival of Britain Office by Joy Ward of the Social Survey of the COI in June to July 1950, actual knowledge of the Festival and its various officially sponsored events was found to be very patchy. The inquiry was carried out in five towns (Shrewsbury, Eastbourne, Wolverhampton, Newcastle, and Bath) and in two London Boroughs (Bermondsey and Chelsea): in each of these places a sample of 250 people between the ages of sixteen and sixty was drawn at random from the National Register. The towns chosen differed considerably from each other. According to the report Eastbourne was selected as a typical seaside town, within easy access to London, but which was not itself a Festival Centre. Newcastle (a Festival Centre) and Wolverhampton were selected as industrial towns some considerable distance from London; Bath was one of the Arts Festival Centres, and Shrewsbury was chosen as a "typical country town" at a considerable distance from London. The

10. Work 25/3, Report by the Director of Public Relations, October 1951. There were a number of Information Centres dealing with Festival Enquiries throughout London.
    The Information Office at the Festival Headquarters, Savoy Court, dealt with 35,500 enquiries in the course of three years up to 30 September 1951.
    The other Festival Information Centres includes those at:
    Swan and Edgar: 29 January to 30 September 1951 this office received 500,000 visitors, 72,000 telephone calls, 37,000 letters, and there were ten languages catered for either in written form or spoken by the attendants.
    Leicester Square: mid-May 1950 to 30 January 1951 there were 1,000 visitors to this centre, 300 telephone calls and 250 letters received.
    Charing Cross: 3 May to September 1951 (i.e. the Festival period. There was a total of 150,000 telephone calls and personal visits made to this centre.

participants in the report were asked firstly whether they had heard of the Festival at all; secondly, they were asked questions designed to establish to what extent the different individual events of the Festival were known; thirdly, they were asked what they thought was the purpose of having such a Festival.[11]

As has already been stated, the report found that actual knowledge of the Festival was very patchy: 63% of the people interviewed had heard of the Festival and knew something of its purpose; 15% had heard of it vaguely but could not give any details of its purpose; and 22% had not heard of it at all. Knowledge of the Festival varied considerably between the seven areas sampled: the two London Boroughs were well-informed, only 3% of the sample in Chelsea had not heard of it. Of the areas chosen outside London, Eastbourne and Bath were well-informed but the other towns knew little about it: in Wolverhampton, for example, 41% of the people sampled did not know about the Festival. Of all the Festival Organisation's projects for the Festival, the South Bank scheme was the only event that was widely known; 35% of those interviewed mentioned this site spontaneously; a further 30% claimed to have heard of it after being prompted; only 12% had heard of the proposed Arts Festivals to be managed by the Arts Council; and a further 32% claimed to have heard of them after being prompted. Battersea Pleasure Gardens was mentioned spontaneously by 10%, and by a further 31% of those interviewed after being prompted. The report said that most of the people interviewed thought of the Festival

11. J.C. Ward, Knowledge and Opinion about the Festival of Britain 1951, June - July 1951.

largely in terms of a Trade Fair with the emphasis on selling "British goods abroad" and of "attracting foreign trade" or of "making Britain known abroad". The report concluded that there was not very great general interest in the Festival at the time the survey was made (June to July 1950). Amongst all the participants in the survey, the score which was awarded for the degree of favourable opinion towards the Festival showed an average of only 2.6 out of a possible count of four points. The people seemed, the report said, to have an incomplete idea of the purpose of the Festival; most people appeared to think that the Festival was to be a short Trade Fair for the purpose of exporting British goods and of showing to overseas visitors what the country was capable of. The wider aspects of the Festival, as seen from the intentions of the Festival's organisers, of having 1951 as a period of national celebrations in honour of the Great Exhibition of 1851, was hardly known at all. In this area the report concluded that:

> if people are to be made more enthusiastic about the Festival, this wider significance of the Festival needs to be brought home to them. At present they feel they have little part in it - they need to be given more personal interest in it. [12]

In spite of this seeming lack of knowledge of an event which was discussed on an almost daily basis in the tabloids from 1949 - 1951, the Festival Organisation continued with their plans for the Festival and its Opening Ceremony at St. Paul's on 3 May 1951. In the final Festival Programme, there were thirteen Festival Organisation-sponsored Official Exhibitions, these were: the

12. Ibid.

Combined Exhibition on the South Bank, the centre-piece of the Festival, which was to open from 4 May until 30 September 1951; the Exhibition of Science and Technology at the Science Museum, South Kensington, opening form 4 May to 30 September; the Exhibition of Architecture, Town Planning and Building Research in Poplar, from 3 May to 30 September; the Exhibiton of Books at the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, from 3 May to 30 September; the Festival Pleasure Gardens at Battersea Park which was to be officially opened on 3 May 1951 but due to problems which have been discussed opened late, on 28 May, and would function as such until 3 November.[13] The Land Travelling Exhibition was planned around the following dates: Manchester, 5 - 26 May; Leeds, 23 June - 14 July; Birmingham, 4 - 25 August; and Nottingham, 15 September - 6 October. The Sea Travelling Exhibition on the Festival Ship "Campania" was programmed to visit: Southampton, 4 - 14 May; Dundee, 18 - 26 May; Newcastle-on-Tyne, 30 May - 16 June; Hull, 20 - 30 June; Plymouth, 5 - 14 July; Bristol, 18 - 28 July; Cardiff 31 July - 11 August; Belfast, 15 August - 1 September; Birkenhead, 5 - 14 September; and Glasgow, 18 September - 6 October. In Scotland, the Exhibition of Industrial Power was being displayed at the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, from 28 May - 18 August; an Exhibition of Twentieth Century Books and Printing was also being held in Glasgow, from 1 June - 28 July; there was an Exhibition of Eighteenth Century Books being held in the Signet Library in Edinburgh from 3 August - 15 September. The Living Traditions Exhibition at the Royal Scottish

13. The Amusement Park of the Pleasure Gardens opened on 11 May 1951. See pp.257-259 for the Problems at the Pleasure Gardens.

Museum from 25 June - 8 September. In Northern Ireland, the Ulster Farm and Factory Exhibition was to be displayed in Belfast from 1 June - 31 August; and in Wales, the Welsh Hillside Scheme, Dolhendre, Merioneth from May to September. These Official events were controlled and financed through the Festival Organisation, with the exception of the Ulster Farm and Factory Exhibition in Belfast which was financed and managed by the Government of Northern Ireland.[14]

In addition to this Official Programme, the Arts Council sponsored the Arts Festival which consisted of a London Season of the Arts, to be held from 3 May - 30 June. There were a further twenty-three Arts Festivals held throughout the country. These included new Festivals programmed between June and August at Aberdeen, 30 July - 13 August; Bournemouth and Wessex, 3 - 17 June; Inverness, 17 - 30 June; Liverpool, 22 July - 12 August; Norwich, 18 - 30 June; Oxford, 2 -16 July; Cambridge 30 July - 18 August; Perth, 27 may - 16 June; St. David's, 10 - 13 July; Dumfries 23 - 30 June; and York, 3 - 17 June. There were other centres, some of which already staged their own established Festivals which, to commemorate the significance of 1951, were executing them on a larger scale than usual: Aldeburgh, 8 - 17 June; Bath, 20 May - 2 June; Brighton 16 July - 25 August; Canterbury, 18 July - 10 August; Cheltenham, 2 - 14 July; Edinburgh, 19 August - 8 September; Llangollen, 3 - 8 July 1951; Llanrwst, 6 - 11 August; Stratford-upon-Avon, 24 March - 27 October; Swansea, 16 - 29

14. Work 25/3, The Story of the Festival of Britain 1951, and Work 25/230, 1951 Exhibition South Bank Festival of Britain Catalogue.

September; Worcester, 2 - 7 September; and Belfast, 7 May - 30 June.[15] Apart from the Official Exhibitions and the Arts Festivals, there were Regional Festivals in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland thereby fulfilling both the Lord President's and the Festival Organisation's wish that the Festival should be a nationwide event. The major events arranged by the Festival of Britain Regional Committees for their respective areas were part of the Official Festival Programme. In addition to these official events there were also local Festivals in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which were arranged by the Local Councils.

On the morning of 3 May 1951, the Opening Ceremony of the Festival of Britain was held at St. Paul's Cathedral in the form of a dedication service in the presence of Their Majesties The King and Queen, and other members of the Royal Family. In the Cathedral, a congregation of nearly 3,000 was assembled, the guests included: the members of the Festival Organisation; the City of London and City Livery Companies; members of the Royal Household and the Diplomatic Corps; also in attendance there were distinguished visitors from abroad; the Government; the members of the Opposition; members of the House of Lords representing both parties; members of the Northern Ireland Parliament; representatives of Government Departments and of the legal profession; the Board of the Admiralty, Army and Air Councils; Heads of Local Authorities in Great Britain and Northern Ireland; there were representatives from the LCC, the British Council of Churches, the Services, Merchant Marine, Trade

15. Ibid. and Work 25/44, The Arts in the Festival of Britain 1951.

Union Congress, British Employers Confederation, Police and Fire Services, Civil Defence, the nursing profession, the Voluntary and Youth Organisation; and newspaper proprietors and editors. In the service, which was broadcast to the Nation, the Archbishop of Canterbury reminded the people that the success of the Festival depended upon the manner in which it was approached:

> such a Festival might be a spiritual disaster, a self-indulgence, an exhibition of pride, but neither our own character nor the harsh circumstances of our times would encourage the misuse of such an occasion. But even so the Festival might be celebrated in a kind of spiritual emptiness devoid of aspiration or inspiration. That would be hardly less disastrous for it would be to deny the past and frustrate the future. [16]

Following the Service which ended with the singing of William Blake's "Jerusalem", the King and Queen, Queen Mary and other members of the Royal Family, the Prime Minister and members of the Government assembled on the west steps of the Cathedral from where the King made his inaugural address:

> One hundred years ago Queen Victoria opened the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. Its creators were far-sighted men moved by the vision of a world in which the spectacular advances of art and science would uplift civilisation to enduring peace and unclouded prosperity.
>
> This Festival, a hundred years later, has been planned, like its great predecessor, as a visible sign of national achievement and confidence. All of us can paint the contrast between the calm security of the Victorian Age and the hard experience of our own. Peace has not endured, and much of the wealth which our forebears created has been dissipated in fire and slaughter. Two world wars have brought us grievous loss of life and treasure; and though the nation has made a splendid effort towards recovery, new burdens have fallen upon it and dark clouds still overhang the whole world.
>
> Yet this is no time for despondency; and I see this Festival as a symbol of Britain's abiding courage and vitality. With the spirit of our ancestors renewed in us, we can, under God's providence, restore and expand the prosperity

16. Work 25/3, The Story of the Festival of Britain 1951.

> of which they laid the foundations. We can draw inspiration from their staunch example, and confidence from the wonderful achievements of our own industry. We have not proved unworthy of our past, and we can do better in the years ahead.

His Majesty emphasised Britain's "rich and vivid past" which gave to the country the opportunity to "look back with pride" and "forward with resolution and confidence." On the whole it was a speech of joy and thanksgiving that the realm united had made a significant effort to provide an occasion whose activities and displays would have enduring value. This theme expanded into a prayer for peace and plenty, then after welcoming guests to the country, his Majesty declared the Festival of Britain Open wishing it "universal success".[17]

Thus, after five years of planning, the Festival of Britain was inaugurated. The Labour Government, in particular Herbert Morrison, ably supported by Max Nicholson and all the members of committees were entitled to feel no small measure of pride at having managed to put together a celebration in the circumstances of post-war Britain. Beyond this, however, there must have been a sense of nostalgia and perhaps sadness that the Festival, being linked so often to the Centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851, must have highlighted the differing context of the times. The fact that the country was forced to consider hosting a national Festival instead of a First-Category International Exhibition, summed up eloquently the true reality of post-war Britain. From as early as 1945, she had already begun to slide to second position in the world

17. Work 25/7, The King's Speech, 3 May 1951.

power rankings but further, internally, the nation itself was clearly not what it had been one hundred earlier: post-war Britain had lost the aggressive assurance of the Victorian era. There can be little doubt that during the 1945-1951 period, there was concern as to exactly what the new role of Britain would be; the drabness of life and continuing economic difficulties in the country were undisguised for all to see; what is more the dawning desire for self-rule in the nation's possessions was all too evident. The new role in world affairs of the united States of America, its land untouched by war and still certain of its material abundance, confident and aggressive in its ambitions of leadership emphasised the financial and spiritual drain which had devastated Europe - there had to be a new role to replace the one which had been shattered both internally and externally.

Thus, along with all the other innovations of the new Jerusalem, the Labour Government, through the men of the Executive Committee, sought to present Britain with a new role, and a new persona. This was not going to be an easy task. From the outset, the Executive and its 'great impressario' Gerald Barry, had tried to breath optimism and purpose into the Festival. They refused to countenance the fact that the Festival was a very poor alternative to the First Category International Exhibition, which Barry himself had suggested as the way to commemorate 1851. The only way in which they could begin to build a new persona was to ignore the fact that they were putting on a show which they felt was the second-best choice. It was a show planned to suit the exigencies of the time, carried out to reveal the best of Britain in hard times. From the outset, Barry, Ismay, Morrison, and Princess Elizabeth all imbued

the Festival with serious motives: it was to bring new recruits to the Arts and Sciences; it was to set standards; disclose a depth of British talent that was deemed as almost exclusive. Moreover, it was to emphasize these qualities in the nation's life so that the notion of British leadership, and indeed supremacy, in culture and the humanities could be developed. This was in direct contrast to other centuries when the concept of supremacy was based on conquest and power. This now seemed undesirable, unrealistic and impossible. But then, there is a greatness in searching for ways of keeping the peace. The Festival of Britain with its emphasis on arts, science and the humanities displayed in such harsh and austere times, perhaps unknowingly was finding a new role for Britain in world affairs. Barry's ideas were echoed by Herbert Morrison in an interview given to The Times Festival Supplement. The Festival he said:

> has deliberately focussed on the arts and sciences - on showing what we have done in them and on stimulating our people to do even better. Few people realise how greatly our position in the Arts, for example, has changed for the better even since twenty years ago. In the composition of music, in ballet, in acting, in film production, in sculpture, and in certain branches of industrial design we hold a position which most countries can envy. I believe that the richness of the Festival programmes will astonish even many of our best informed critics, and will give us a new kind of prestige such as France and certain other countries have held for many generations.

The Executive and its Director General as well as the sponsors of the Festival were attempting to redefine Britain's public image, which for centuries had been based on conquest and power, with a sweeping and unique exhibition involving as it did the whole of the nation. However, one must ask if an exhibition which by its very nature is ephemeral could do all this? Ultimately it was hoped that

the Festival would produce a status for the people of Britain as potent as the tradition and legend of her past. This was summed up by Morrison in his interview for the Times:

> I am not prophesying what the lasting value of the Festival will be. All I can say is that if it revives some of the spirit of 1851, if it cheers up the British people and helps them to understand and improve upon, and hold fast to the best of their ways of life; if it throws open more widely the doors of the Arts and Sciences and their appreciation and use; if it tells the world something more of the reasons why Britain has been, and is, and will be a great nation and one which every traveller should visit; if it stirs up people to brighten and tidy and improve their own towns and villages; if it disperses any illusion that the cultures and achievements of the North and East and Midlands and West and of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are in any way inferior to those of London; if it helps to bring Londoners to tackle the long-neglected redevelopment of their own great city, the Festival of Britain will certainly have amply justified itself.[18]

18. The Times Festival of Britain Supplement, May 1951.